

Fig. 1: Darius and Alexander meet at Gaugamela.
The standard, partly obscured, is to the viewer's right of the mosaic
(Reproduced by permission of the National Museum, Naples)

5000 YEARS OF PERSIAN MILITARY BANNERS

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ALEXANDER vs DARIUS - THE FLAG CLUE

In October 1831 a discovery was made (1) which electrified intellectuals across Europe. In Italy a large mosaic (Fig. 1) was unearthed representing a battle scene between Alexander the Great and King Darius of Persia, based on a painting nearly contemporary with the event (2). Although damaged, the mosaic clearly presents a moment in military history of the highest drama. The two most powerful armies of the world are met in the full bloody fury which their leaders - here but yards apart - have long prepared for. Spears and lances thicken the air, horses wheel under the charioteer's whip, each soldier acts on instincts developed in months of training to avoid that error which could send him lifeless to the ground.

This is no ordinary battle, however, as the German poet Goethe and others were quick to explain. This engagement, this very moment, is one of those few truly decisive turning points in world history. Darius, master of western Asia, defeated at the Battle of Issus in 333 BCE, had over a year to prepare for another engagement with Alexander (3). Here, in the heartland of his Empire, on 1 October 331, Darius will be overwhelmed in the Battle of Gaugamela (Arbela) in an attack led personally by the 25-year old Macedonian. Alexander's success will open Babylon, Susa and Persepolis to him, and beyond them, all of what in our day constitutes Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

At least in the idealized view of those who like their history writ in sweeping generalizations, Alexander's is a victory of West over East, Youth over Age, Freedom over Tyranny, the success of those willing to dare all odds to achieve great dreams. That Alexander and his Companions will be successful in their bold endeavour is implicit in the artistic composition itself. The central, highest figure - The Great King - faces the onslaught, but all around him the outcome of the battle is plainly expressed in confusion and flight. Darius' own horses flee from the debacle and Persian soldiers in the background retreat in disorder.

Or do they? Over the past century and half since the discovery of the mosaic, a debate has grown which has fundamental implications for the interpretation of the scene portrayed. If the soldiers in the background are not Persian or Greek mercenaries in the service of Darius, a wholly new meaning is given to the encounter. If Macedonian soldiers have

outflanked Darius and are threatening to cut him off, the hasty exit implicit in the flight of his horses is only strategic common sense. Moreover, the entry to his right of Alexander exhibits no audacious valor on the latter's part, since his troops have already put the Persian king in danger. that in turn restricts the possibility of believing the heroic interpretation which Europeans who first saw the mosaic in the last century thrilled to find frozen into the scene. Rather, the mosaic becomes simply a piece of reportage from the battlefield. Macedonian troops have broken through the Persian lines, threatening to cut off King Darius and Alexander and his Companions advance to take advantage of the situation.

The key to resolving the two possible understandings of the mosaic, recently analysed brilliantly by Carl Nylander, is a flag. The clothing of the soldiers in the background suggests they were Persians rather than Greeks, but the evidence is not conclusive. The *sarissai* - lances of 15' to 20' in length - were Macedonian weapons, but they might well have been adopted by Darius in the three years between his first major battle with Alexander and the defeat he suffered at Gaugamela. The one unequivocal piece of evidence establishing the nationality of the soldiers is their flag hanging from a cross-bar raised on a spear to the right of Darius' charioteer. That flag, once crucial in the original battle, today becomes the chief element in analyzing the evidence of the mosaic in order better to understand what occurred in the field.

Although it is badly damaged, the mosaic flag gives us decisive clues. It is not, as some have suggested, the red signal flag of the Macedonians known as a *phoinikes*. The field is indeed dark red, but it unmistakably shows - especially in the sketches made when the mosaic was first discovered and before sustaining damage in its excavation and display at the National Museum of Naples - a golden cock represented across the fabric (5). This is the Zoroastrian symbol known as *Parodash*, presumably favoured by Darius to emphasize his adherence to the old religion of the Persians.

The sacramental nature of the standard is no accident. Almost universally in the ancient world, standards and banners - whether used by the armed forces or individual rulers - had a religious significance. On the one hand they represented a prayer expressed by those who used them that the gods look favorably on their enterprises (6). Even the form of the flag, an object at the top of a long pole, suggests its function as a prayer extended from earth to heaven. Indeed, in Japan, a standard was looked at as a kind of "lightning rod" through which divine power might flow to the warrior who bore it. On the other side of the equation, the flag was visible evidence of the semi-divine nature of the leader and the holy mission of his army, in Iran and elsewhere. The titles of ancient rulers, the ceremonies they performed and the attributes they chose for their coins and palaces all reflected the

desire to associate clearly the actions of the sovereign with the immutable laws of the universe. It is small wonder that the most common designs in military flags throughout history have been religious symbols (the sun, crescent moon, cross, eagle etc), religious inscriptions and the representations of rulers and gods.

We know from the ruins at Persepolis that the Persian royal standard used in the throne room behind the king consisted of a square piece of cloth attached to a cross-bar mounted on a pole. (This is what the Romans would later call a *vexillum*.) We also know that the flag was even more important in the battlefield because it gave evidence to the troops that the king was moving in one direction or another, and more fundamentally, that he was alive and in command. Xenophon, writing about Darius' ancestor, Cyrus the Great, refers to his Babylonian campaign:

and he gave orders to keep an eye upon his ensign and advance in even step

Referring to the revolt of Cyrus the Younger which Xenophon participated in, the latter mentions that the Greek mercenaries could not witness directly what was going on in battle but they were able to see the royal standard raised aloft on a pole (7).

THE EAGLE, THE DRAGON, AND THE LION

A different royal standard from the one used by Darius but even more important in Persian history was described by Xenophon. It was a great spreadwinged eagle of gold mounted on a pole (Fig. 2)

The eagle is indeed one of the oldest military emblems of humankind (8): in Mesopotamia, as early as the end of the 4th millennium BCE, such standards are known and they appear shortly thereafter in Elam, one of the earliest states in what today is Iran (9). Other Persian areas had similar standards including Susa in the 3rd millennium BCE and a thousand years later, Luristan (10). The Achaemenid dynasty (of which Cyrus and Darius were prominent sovereigns) flaunted the eagle (Fig. 3) as did the Parthians who succeeded the Seleucid rulers who briefly inherited Alexander's mantle. So common was the emblem, scholars have suggested (11) that the biblical reference in Isaiah 46:11 to a ravenous bird from the east is probably a veiled reference to Persia.

In all cases, costly materials and skilled workmanship were employed: the design of even the earliest eagle standards is sophisticated and rendered with care. These military standards are a tribute to the technology and culture of the societies that created them. The earliest seem to be *apotropaic*, that is to say, they were designed to propitiate the gods.

Later, they reinforced loyalty to the religious and political forces which united to run the state and provide social stability. As one author puts it,

as soon as there is literary evidence to provide interpretation it becomes evidence that this (eagle) is a symbol of the Sky God who was the Great God represented on earth by the ruler (12).

It is no accident that the sky god of the Greeks, Zeus, had the eagle as his chief symbol, as did his later Roman counterpart, Jupiter. While the early Mesopotamian tradition adopted by the Persians may not have been directly responsible for the Greek and Roman eagles, at the very least it cannot have helped but reinforce it (13).

The eagle and its kin were not the only **thereiomorphic** symbols of Persian military force. In the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad there is a magnificent silver head of a beast unlike any which has existed in reality (14). The leading Iranian scholar on military flags believes that this is a part of an original Dragon Flag (15).

Standards of this kind (Fig. 4), carried by Parthian troops greatly impressed the Romans, who adopted the form for use in their own armies (16). From there it spread throughout Europe and remained popular long after the Roman Empire disappeared. Generally considered as a pagan symbol, it disappeared as Christian forces advanced: the cross of William the Conqueror, for example, defeated the dragon standard of King Harold of the Saxons, as we see in the Bayeux tapestry rendition of the Battle of Hastings. Nevertheless, the Dragon Flag was used by the Tudor kings of England and the battle of Bosworth Field took place in 1485 under a red dragon standard.

The remarkable thing about the Dragon Flag is the way it was constructed - unlike almost every other flag in the history of mankind. At the top of a pole appeared the head of a monster which has been described as looking like

a mythical beast, composed of a dog, rhinoceros and crocodile (17).

Attached behind this was what can best be described as a wind-sock made of silk, usually bright red with gold and silver threads. This form with its tail, scales, and fins, constituted the body of the dragon. As carried in battle, especially when a breeze blew, and the standard bearer swung the pole from side to side, the silk body was inflated by the wind and snapped back and forth like some great beast hovering over the troops. A whistle-like device was mounted in the mouth such that the wind passing through created a shrieking sound appropriate to the appearance of the dragon. The total effect was calculated to instil

fear into the enemy through a combination of color, motion, sound and grotesque form. In this sense the Dragon Flag was one of the earliest attempts to enhance the might of an army by psychological means (18).

The third great beast in the Iranian military menagerie was the lion, used at least as early as 3000 BCE. It appeared in the Khabis standard (Fig. 5) the oldest known flag in the world still extant. It is possible that the lion figured among the symbols of Iran's Achaemenid dynasty, referred to by the Roman historian Quintus Curtius Rufus when he described the army:

every nationality marches beneath its own banner (19)

What is certain is that the Sassanids who ruled Persia between the 3rd and 7th centuries CE, the Seljuks of the 11th through the 13th centuries, the Timurids who followed them and ruled until 1501, and many subsequent dynasties emblazoned lions on their military standards. It has been suggested (20) that the lion, both in its form and significance, was derived from the astrological figure for Leo (21).

While many nations have favoured a lion on their military standards, in Iran since at least the 14th century, the distinctive form has always been shown a rising sun behind the lion (Fig. 6). The Mongol ruler Suyurgatmish who ruled at Samarkand displayed this lion and sun on his palace. His vizier, Timur, overthrew Suyurgatmish and went on to establish his own rule in Persia and neighbouring countries. Known to history as Timur the Lame (or Tamerlane) because of his war wounds, Timur had a symbol on his tents showing three rings for the three worlds he claimed to rule (22). Nevertheless he also used the lion emblem; likewise the founder of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722), Shah Ismail, had a green banner with a white crescent, but all of his successors flaunted the lion and sun banner. In this era it became firmly established as the national emblem of Iran.

The sun emblem (Fig. 7) has been used in Iran since very early times (23). Indeed there is reason to believe that it goes back to the worship of Mithras, prevalent among the Aryans who settled there in the second millennium BCE. Mithras the "invincible sun" was their chief god. Later he was recognized as the "angel of light" in Zoroastrianism. As such Mithras was represented, in either human or solar form, on military standards carried by Persian troops. In the 5th century armies under Kai Khosru used a turquoise blue flag with a golden sun (24).

THE KAVIANI STAR AND LATER FLAGS

Another astral symbol, the Kaviani star - the most resplendent and famous flag in the country's history (Fig. 8) - lit up the battlefields for Persian warriors from about 3000 BCE (25) until captured by the Arabs at the Battle of Qadisiya in 637 CE (26). When the 11th century poet Ferdausi ("the heavenly") wrote the greatest epic of Persian history, the *Shahnameh*, many of its verses exalted the days before Arab rule by recalling the exploits of the Kaviani star. When this standard was carried before the troops, it was said, the world was bathed in reflections of yellow, red and violet. This happy flag, according to Ferdausi, sparkled with jewels like another sun; it shone in the night like another moon; and it filled the hearts of those in this world with hope while striking fear among the enemy. Like the oriflamme of France, the Kaviani star is known best from its legendary origin and its tragic demise. The intervening centuries of its career on the battlefield - without doubt involving replacement many times by successors - are summarized by the oft repeated line in historical accounts:

in the forefront went the Kaviani banner

It is said (27) that the world was ruled in ancient times by the evil tyrant Zahhak who sought to enlist men in the armies of the devil, with himself as commander. A brave smith named Kava, who had lost 17 sons in the endless wars Zahhak initiated, finally confronted the king in his throne room when plans were being drawn up which would have called Kava's eighteenth and last son into military service. This early Patrick Henry challenged the tyrant thus

I am a simple blacksmith, doing no wrong,- yet fire descends on my head from your majesty You and I must come to a reckoning and then the world will stand in amazement!

With that Kava strode out of the palace into the market place. Here he took off his leather apron, and raised it high on the end of a spear, calling on everyone opposed to Zahhak's tyranny to join him under this banner. They all marched to the Alborz mountains and proclaimed Fereidun their king. The latter took from his treasury all sorts of jewels and gold which were used to decorate the Kaviani star. Fereidun was eventually victorious over Zahhak and established one of his sons as the first Idng of Iran. Succeeding kings added their treasures to the simple leather apron which had become the talisman of Persian military victory.

Whatever the legendary genesis of this tale may have been, it was believed to be true during the Sassanid dynasty. Its kings bore their own Kaviani star into battle from the mid-3rd to the mid-7th century CE. When the forces of Islam spread from Arabia to neighbouring countries, the Sassanids went down in defeat at the Battle of Qadisiya which ended over 2000 years of Aryan dominance in the land. In the *Shah-nameh* it is the very capture of the flag which symbolizes the end of this era, for the leader of the Arabs recognizes it to be

the star in which lies the strength of Iran (28).

Exaggerated tales are told of its size and the value of the jewels which were stripped from the Kaviani star, but the key point is that the Arabs destroyed it to terminate its supposed mystical powers and its clearly established inspirational value for the Iranians - thus robbing them of a focal point for revolt against Arab rule (29). The *Shah-nameh* (30) describes the loss of the Kaviani star thus:

of the Iranian warriors not one stood fast. No longer were drum and banner to be seen at their stations and men's eyes were darkened by the stress of battle. Even the most valiant turned their backs and all their striving profited them no more than if they had sought to grasp the air.

Of course the old traditions eventually gave way to new ones which, in their own time, were considered glorious and awe-inspiring. Under the Arabs' Abbasid dynasty, flags of black, (today one of the four principal colours of pan-Arabism) developed in Iran (31). Persians also originated the custom of placing Koranic inscriptions on banners and for over 1000 years since that time Arab military flags have continued that tradition (32). While in our own century Hitler and other dictators have been noted for their manipulative use of flags and uniforms, as early as the 10th century the basic principles were understood in Iran. One author notes

the flag was intended to awe the soldiery into obedience, and to this end the utmost display in both size and number of flags was made, as many as 500 being unfurled for an important expedition (33).

While all these flags were Muslim in their message and content, at a very early stage Persians made explicit reference to the fact that they were Shi'ites, i.e. partisans of Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad. The turning point in their schism with the Sunni (who predominate among Arab Muslims), dates from the Battle of Karbala in 670CE. In that encounter Muhammad's own grandson, Hussein, was tortured and killed, a martyrdom

which inspired Iranian warriors with religious fervour, even today fuelling the holy war Iran carries on against Iraq. Symbols derived from this event have been popular in Iranian military flags over the past millennium. For example, a silhouette of the hand of Hussein serves as a finial at the top of flag poles. The "sword of Ali" is featured in the flags themselves (Fig. 9) and the colour green associated with Ali is a popular one (34).

The Mongol and Turkomen rulers of Iran who followed the Arabs imported their own distinctive flags. Mongol flags left no permanent impact in Iran.

The principal standard of the Turkish people - as evidenced by their invasions of Anatolia and Europe as well as Iran - was the *tugh*, a standard comprised of horsetails mounted on a pole and frequently dyed red (35). From the 16th century on there was remarkable continuity in the general design of Persian military flags. The motifs were exclusively of a religious nature - emphasizing Shi'ite inscriptions and symbols, particularly the sword of Ali - but with the national lion and sun emblem of increasing popularity. Perhaps under western influence, striped backgrounds became common and eventually white, green and red were recognized as the national colours.

Following the revolution of 1906 and the introduction of Iran's first written constitution, a horizontal tricolour of green white and red was firmly established (although modifications by different regimes have been found in the central emblem). Completely absent in modern Iran are the old standards in which the emblem at the top of the pole was of the greatest significance, the cloth attached below being simply a decorative accessory. The animals and astral symbols of the past are gone too, being inconsistent with the Islamic character of the nation. The exception is the lion and sun, which, while intimating the Zoroastrian and Sassanid roots of the nation, came to be considered so distinctive of Iran that it served under the Geneva Convention as a recognized battlefield alternative to the red cross and red crescent used by other countries. Under the chiliastic regime of Khomeini, the lion and sun has been completely abandoned in favour of more orthodox Muslim symbols.

IRAN'S IMPACT ON WESTERN FLAG TRADITIONS

While Persian military banners may seem a topic of rather esoteric and limited interest, much of what we take for granted in the banners of western armies may be directly related to customs which were developed in Iran - or at the very least were transmitted through Persian influence from neighbouring societies into the west. It has been claimed (36) that heraldry itself originated in Iran, was adopted by the Saracens and eventually brought back

by the Crusaders to Europe. In this connection it is pointed out that the English **rank** and the French **rang** come from the Persian word for colour, **reng**. The heraldic names for red and blue, - **gules** and **azure** - are Persian in origin. It is not clear if the geometric patterns and the symbolic animals found in banners in early Persia formed the basis for the shields which were and are the core of personal heraldry, but this source cannot be ruled out.

Certainly three specific flag symbols - the eagle, the dragon and the lion - owe much to early use in Iran.

Other contributions have also been attributed to Persian influence. What we take for granted today - that a flag is a piece of cloth which bears a significant design and is attached to a pole - may have been an ancient Aryan custom developed in India and Iran, later to be adopted by the nations in Europe whence it was transmitted to the rest of the world (37). Certainly the availability in Iran of silk from China was a major factor in the transition from standards made of metal or leather to flags of modern format. Another widespread and familiar military custom, the use of fringe on flags, may be derived from the horsetail decorations found in ancient Iran (38).

While today the Dragon Banner is unknown to any but specialists, it was of great importance in Europe under the Roman Empire and for at least a thousand years thereafter. Iran can claim to be the home of the Dragon Flag as well as the Liberty Cap, originally worn by freed slaves. Use of this cap was a Parthian custom, adopted by the Romans and revived by neoclassicists at the time of the French and American Revolutions. A liberty cap on a pole was one of the protest standards of the early American Revolution and as late as the Civil War it figures in regimental colours of Union troops.

The two most important beasts of European heraldry - the eagle and the lion - had early and extensive use in Iran. One author claims that the double-headed eagle, later emblazoned on military banners by Russia and Germany (among others) first originated in Iran (39). The use of inscriptions on flags and celestial symbols found early expression there also (40).

Finally, the very spirit of the flag as a phenomenon in human history clearly owes much to the Persian tradition. A flag functions as a prayer, an invocation of divine sanction, a commemoration of past events, an expression of heavenly aspirations and of earthly might. In the design of every flag tribute is paid to individual rulers, events and ideological principles by which armies may be aroused and led. Without flags, the military is not only less colourful, but less effective - a lesson understood in Iran at least 5000 years ago.

NOTES

- 1 Karl Nylander *The Standard of the Great King: A Problem in the Alexander Mosaic* Opuscula Romana Vol XIV no. 2, p29
- 2 Ibid., p35
- 3 Ibid.,
- 4 Ibid.,p21
- 5 Ibid., pp29 and 32

- 6 There are exact modern parallels in the regimental colors being carried during the First World War by German and Russian troops, which were emblazoned in their respective national languages, God (Be) with us.

- 7 Yahya Zoka, *The Imperial Iranian Army from Cyrus to Pahlavi* (Tehran?: Imperial Iranian Armed Forces Committee for the Celebration of the 2500th Anniversary of the Founding of the Persian Empire (ca 1971) pp72-73

- 8 Sometimes a vulture, a hawk or other large raptor was substituted.

- 9 Phyllis Ackerman, *Standards, Banners, and Badges A Survey of Persian Art*, ed. Arthur Upham Pope, (London: Oxford University Press 1939) Vol III p2766.

- 10 What might we have seen when such an eagle standard was raised on the battlefield? Clearly, it would not have been a flag in the modern sense. The silken banners with eagles carried by the troops of the United States, Savoy, Russia, the Holy Roman Empire, Poland, Austria-Hungary and other powers of the past few centuries were totally unknown thousands of years ago.

Fortunately, we have a number of sources - including coins, architectural friezes at Persepolis, statuary, literary references, and some actual surviving standards - which allow us to reconstruct these vexilloids. The very oldest, dating from about 3000 BCE was discovered in Khabis, east of Shahdad in 1972. The flag is a metal plate about 9" (23 cm) square, its staff passing through sockets at the top and bottom of the hoist edge. The design engraved on the metal shows a goddess, reclining lions, a bull, flowing water, and three worshippers. The most striking feature, however, is a bird - quite possibly an eagle - which serves as a finial at the top of the pole. Its wings spread across almost half the length of the flag.

Similarly a metal plate found in 1948 and believed to have been hoisted on a pole as a standard presents a striking spread-eagle design. The background of blue is made of lapis lazuli paste; triangles of green, white and red frame the central motif, which includes a golden sun over the head of the eagle (see Zoka, pp77 and 82) and Nylander, p 26, note 31). In Parthian coins from the 3rd to 1st century BCE the royal flag is consistently shown as a vexillum with an eagle finial at the top of the pole. The cloth itself is decorated with a diagonal cross separating four disks - perhaps representing the four quarters of the universe or the four seasons.

- 11 Ackerman, p2768
- 12 Ackerman, p2778

- 13 We know that the eagle standards of the Roman Empire spread this symbol throughout Europe, North Africa, and the Near East. In turn the eagle became indelibly associated with the general concept of empire in the Western world and has persisted as such to the present day. The nostalgic resurrection of the republican traditions from Rome which occurred at the time of the American and French Revolutions was responsible for the continuation of the eagle (without its religious and monarchical associations) up to the present day. American soldiers at Gettysburg and Verdun hefted poles topped by golden spread-eagles which would not have appeared strange to the Medes and Persians who preceded them by some 3000 years.
- 14 Zoka, pp112 and 115
- 15 The Parthians seem to have been the first to introduce the Dragon Flag in Iran, but its use continued under the Sassanids (3rd through the 7th century CE, the Timurids (14th and 15th centuries) and even the Safavids of the early 16th century (Ackerman pp2772m, 2779 and 2780).
- 16 A carving of such a standard is found on Trajan's column in Rome (Zoka, p116)
- 17 Zoka, p112
- 18 The massing of banners, the grotesque heraldic helmet crests of the Middle Ages, the death's head emblem on uniforms and banners, and the use of live eagles by troops are parallel examples. Regarding the latter, see inter alia, Old Abe: The Live War-Eagle of Wisconsin by JO Barrett (Madison: Atwood and Culver, 1876)
- 19 Zoka, p72
- 20 Ackerman, p2778
- 21 All the great poets and historians of Iran from the 11th century onward refer to lion banners, according to a modern authority (letter of Dr SR Schafagh of Tehran to General Robert E Whyllie dated 9 February 1945; copy in the Flag Research Center.) Muhammad's son-in-law Ali, who figures prominently in Shi'ite traditions, was known as Assad 'ullah - "lion of god".
- 22 Ackerman. p2778
- 23 Ibid., p2769 and Zoka, pp116-117
- 24 Yacoub Artin, Contributions a l'etude du blason en Orient (London:Quatrich) 1902 p25. While direct evidence linking these uses of the sun with later lion and sun emblems are lacking, the blue colour (representing the Great Sky) came to be recognized as the national colour of Iran, according to Artin, p21. The crescent moon was also found in standards and banners of Iran, long before the Muslim use of that symbol, but it was certainly not the most important emblem.
- Of greater antiquity and importance was the star which for hundreds of years, if not longer, was the chief emblem of royal and military banners in Iran. There is some reason to think that its origin as a symbol in the Middle East in general may be traced to the appearance of a supernova which burst forth in the constellation Vela between 6000 and 10000 years ago.

Believed to have been the brightest supernova ever seen on earth, this new star was credited by ancient Egyptians and Sumerians with teaching the arts of civilization - agriculture, writing and mathematics. It was represented in both those cultures as a dot from which seven or eight tapering rays extended in all directions. See articles by Boyce Rensberger in The New York Times 18 July 1978 Old Text is linked to 1054 Supernova and 21 November 1978 Egyptian Culture is Linked to a Star

- 25 Ackerman, p2766
26 Artin, p25
- 27 Ferdowsi *The Epic of the Kings: Shah-Nama, the National Epic of Persia*, translated by Reuben Levy, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul) 1967 pp17-20.
- 28 Ibid., p128
29 Ackerman, pp2769-2770
30 Ferdowsi, p126
31 Artin pp26, 27 and 31ff
32 Ackerman p2774
33 Ibid.,
- 34 Ali is supposed to have worn the green cloak of Muhammad in order to fool those who sought to assassinate the Prophet. When they attacked, Ali threw off the cloak and pulled his sword from its sheath to defend himself. His enemies had nailed the sword into its sheath, but the force with which he withdrew the sword caused the nails to rive the blade down the centre. The resulting double-bladed sword became a distinctive form popular in military banners.
- 35 A European visitor to Iran notes during the era of Safavid Turqs (1501-1722):
their ensigns are cut in points ... and they are made in all colours and all kinds of rich fabrics. They have no other ensigns, either for the cavalry or for the infantry ... One of the chief military offices of Persia is that of Standard Bearer (Ackerman p2780).
- 36 Artin, p12
37 Ackerman, pp2767-2768
38 Ackerman, p2770
39 Artin, p13
40 Ackerman, p2774.

- Figs. 2 and 3:
- Eagle standards of ancient Iran



Imperial Achaemenian standard,
with effigy of homa, Achaeme-
nian period.



Fig. 4:
Dragon standard
of the Parthians

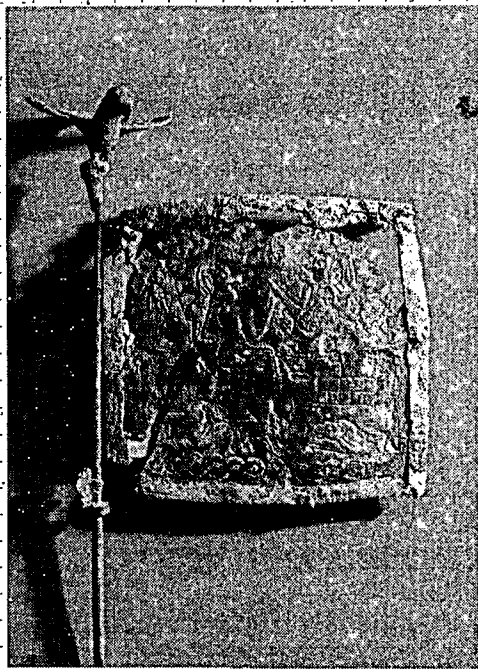


Fig. 5:
The Khabis standard
is the oldest known
flag in the world extant
and featured
a lion emblem

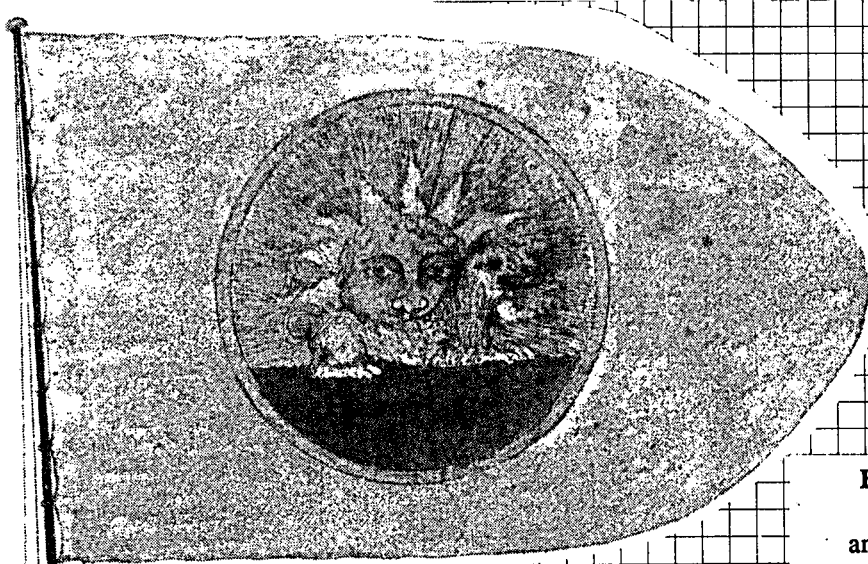


Fig. 6:
Lion
and Sun
forerunners
of modern
emblems
of Iran

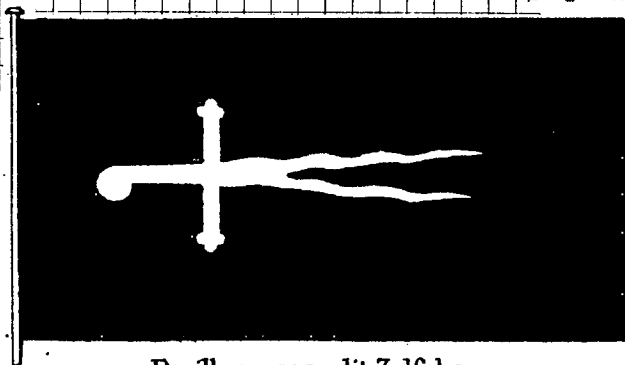
Fig. 7:
The sun
emblem -
symbol
of fire
and
Zarathustra



Fig. 8:
Kava's
Star



Fig. 9:
The Sword of Ali



Pavillon persan dit Zulfekar
(Porté par certains indigènes du Golfe Persique).