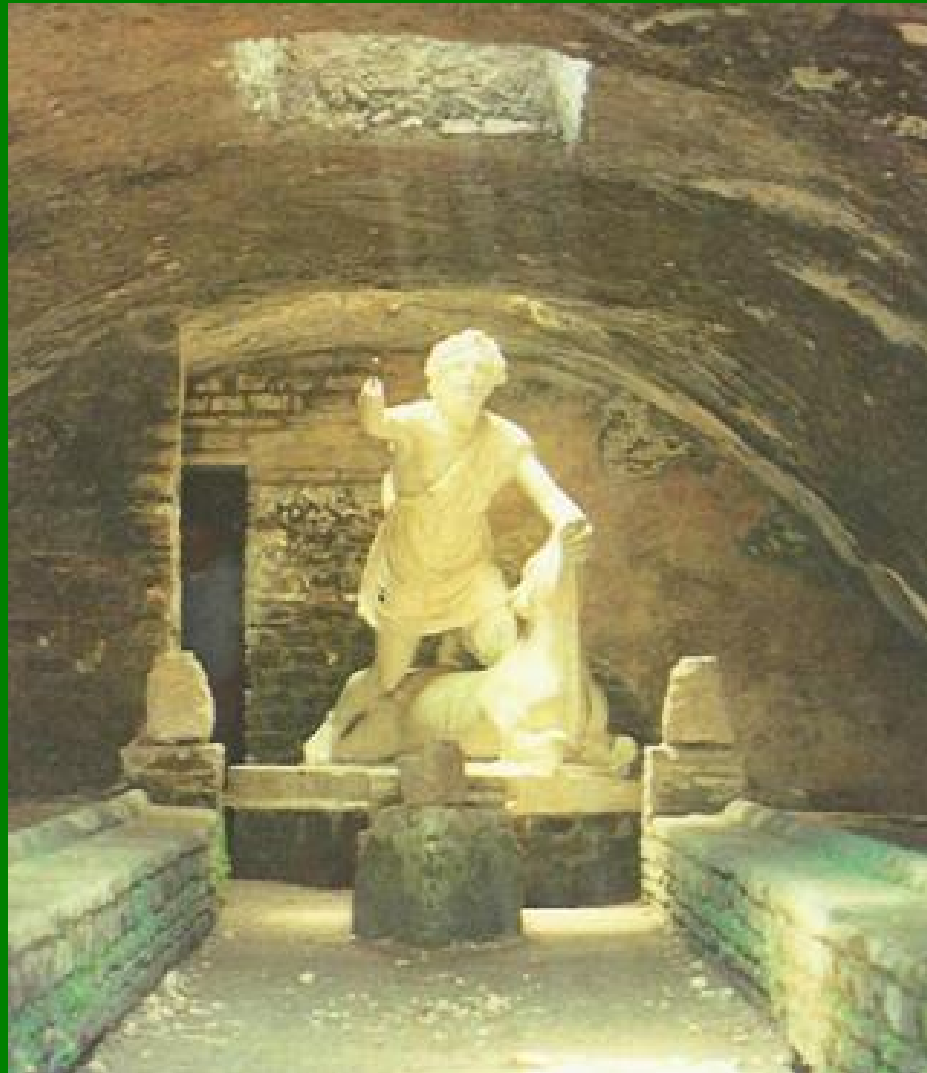


DR. KAVEH FARROKH:

The Lion and Sun Motif of Iran: A brief Analysis

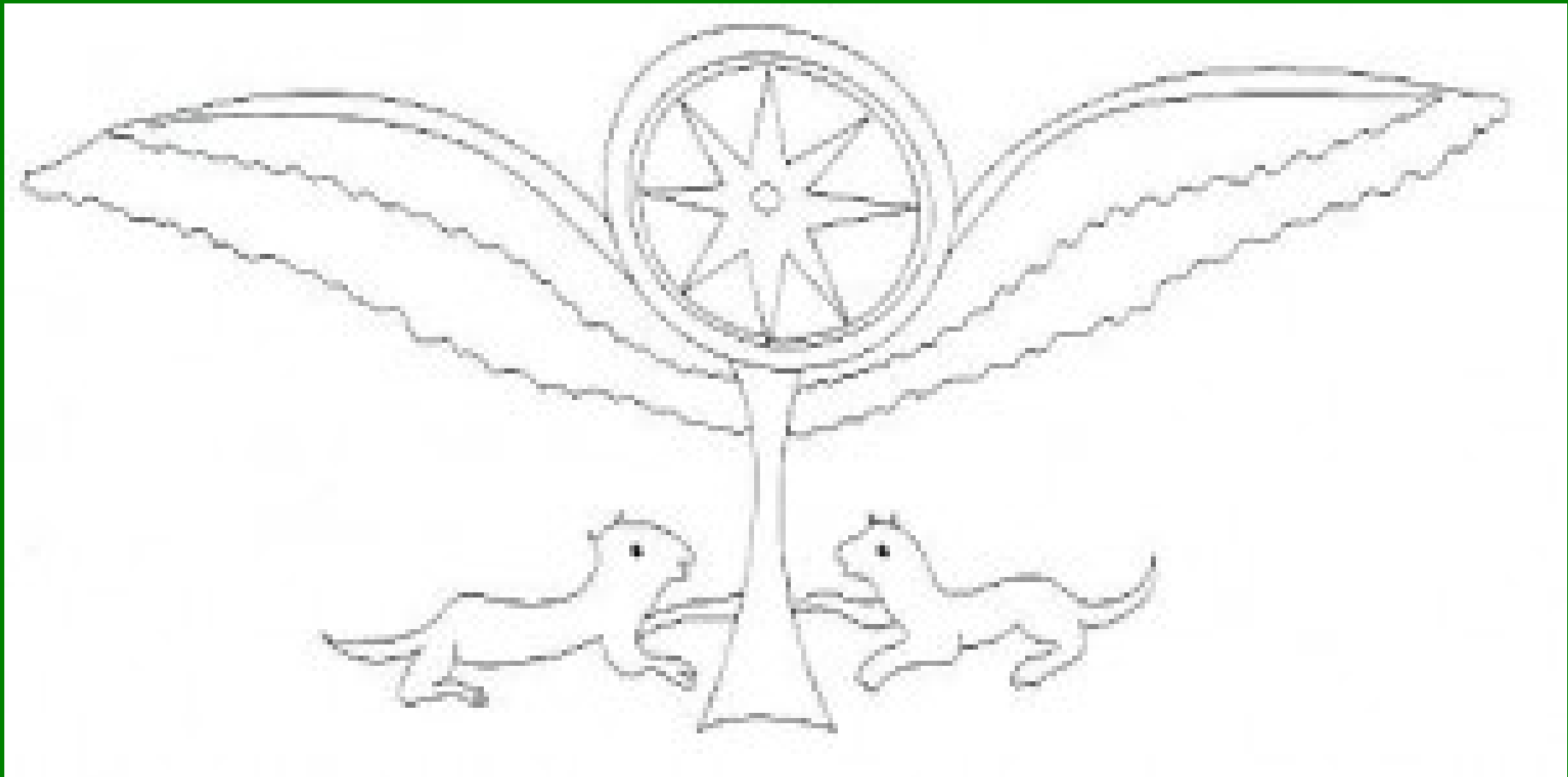
<http://www.kavehfarrokh.com/news/the-lion-and-sun-motif-of-iran-a-brief-analysis/>



A Roman version of the statue of Mithras in a Mithraic temple in Ostia, Italy (Consult, Hinnels, 1988, pp.83). Note the opening on the ceiling just above Mithras, allowing from the sun rays to “illuminate “ the god. Mithras in Iranian mythology is the bringer of light and justice and a manifestation of the eternal sun.

Kurdish man engaged in the worship of Mithras in a Pir's (mystical leader/ Master) sanctuary which acts as a Mithraic temple(Courtesy Kasraian & Arshi, 1993, Plate 80). Note how he stands below an opening allowing for the "shining of the light", almost exactly as seen with the statue in Ostia, Italy. These particular Kurds are said to pay homage to Mithras three times a day.





**The Cylinder of King Sausetar (Courtesy of Khorsandi, 2006,pp.320).
This is the oldest evidence of the Lion-Sun motif as noted by
Nayernuri(1965,pp.78).**



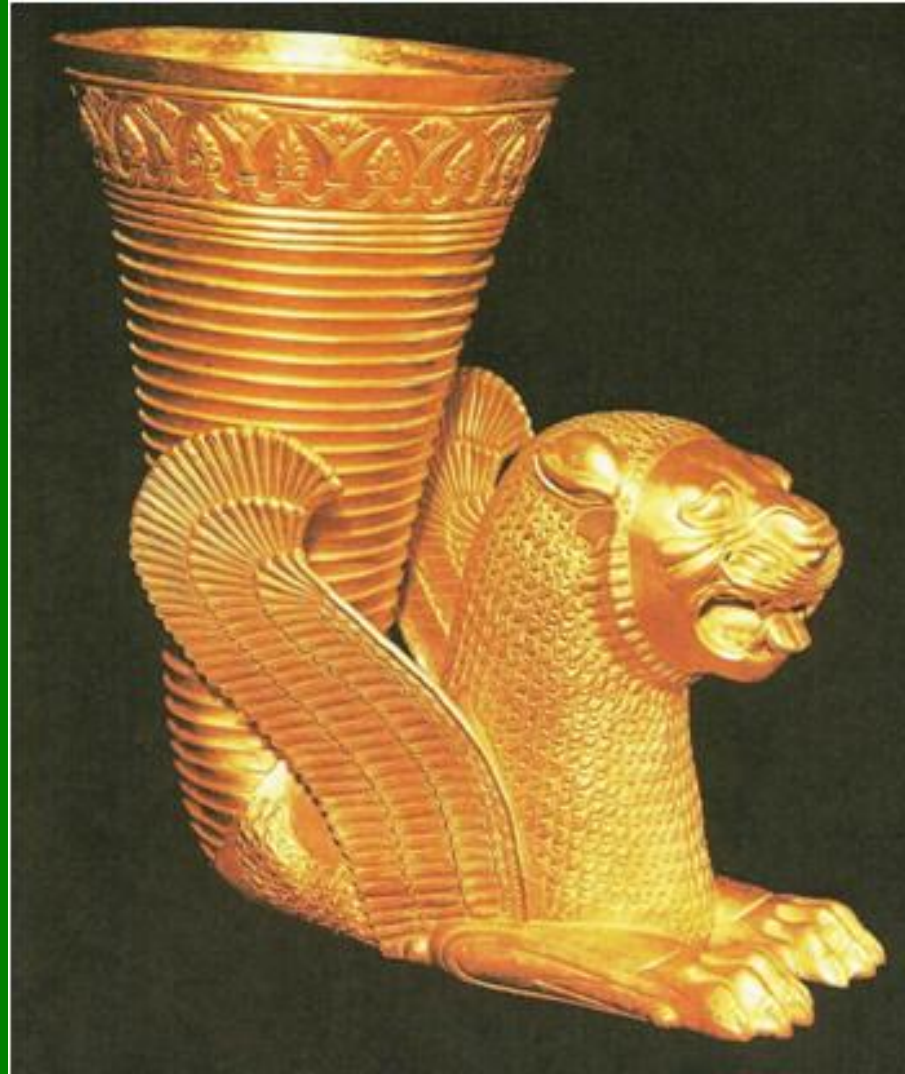
King Artaxerxes II (at left) facing the goddess Anahita who sits atop a lion. In the background to Anahita can be seen the clear display of the sun which is a representation of the ancient Iranian god Mithras. Note that the sun emanates 21 rays, the same symbol which is used by various ancient Iranian cults among the Kurds of Iran, Iraq and Turkey. The 21 rays may be related to the festival date of Mehregan (Festival of the Sun-god Mithras) which takes place from the 16th of Mehr of the Iranian Calendar.



Depiction of a Lion tormenting prey at the stairway of the Apadana Hall of Persepolis. The Lion was an Iranian mythological symbol of strength and virility. The same type of Lion hunter theme is also in the arts of North Iranian peoples such as the Scythians of ancient Ukraine and south Russia.



Achaemenid eagle as displayed upon a tile at Persepolis, which was according to Sekunda” ...probably representing the royal standard”(1992,pp.12). This symbol along with the lion and the ram was to endure well into Sassanian times. The lion Motif however was to survive the Islamic conquests and resurface on the banners and fags of Iran well into the twentieth century.



Achaemenid Rhyton in the shape of a Lioness. Iranian rhyton arts also influenced the arts of ancient Greece as seen in the Athenian rhyton now housed at Museo di Archeologia Ligure, Genova.



**This lion's head from the top of a column at Persepolis
(Consult Hinnels, 1988,pp.10)**



A reconstruction by Duncan Head and Richard Scollins (1992, Plate Eight) of Darius III (380-330 BC) the last Achaemenid king. By this time, the image of the Sun (like the lion) had become a primary symbol of the Iranian realm.



A winged Lion (or griffin) as depicted in Achaemenid arts. As noted by Darius Kadivar, this image was falsely depicted as a “Roman” symbol in the blockbuster movie, Gladiator starring Russell Crowe.



Preliminary photo of the golden winged-Lion of Meshkhati (Copuright of Georgian Academy of Sciences and Manuscripts, Tibilisi, Georgia). Georgian Iranologist and the Georgian Academy and sciences have determined that the origin of this lion is from Iran. The reports of the study have been transferred to Kaveh Farrokh to be compiled for publication.



Golden necklace or pectoral of an ancient Iranian queen in what is now North Ossetia. The areas shown with black rectangle depict lions attacking their prey—these are virtually identical to those seen in the Apadana stairway at Persepolis.



A portion of the Pazyryk carpet found in Central Asia dated to 2500 years ago. Known as the first known Persian carpet, note the depictions of mythical (winged) lions on the bottom panels. Of interest are the "X" type symbols along the top panels. These were to become a central motif in the major standard of Parthe-Sassanian Iran: the Drafsh e Kaviani or the Standard of Kaveh.

A Partian standard bearer with the Sun of Mithras standard (Iranian Army reconstruction in 1971).

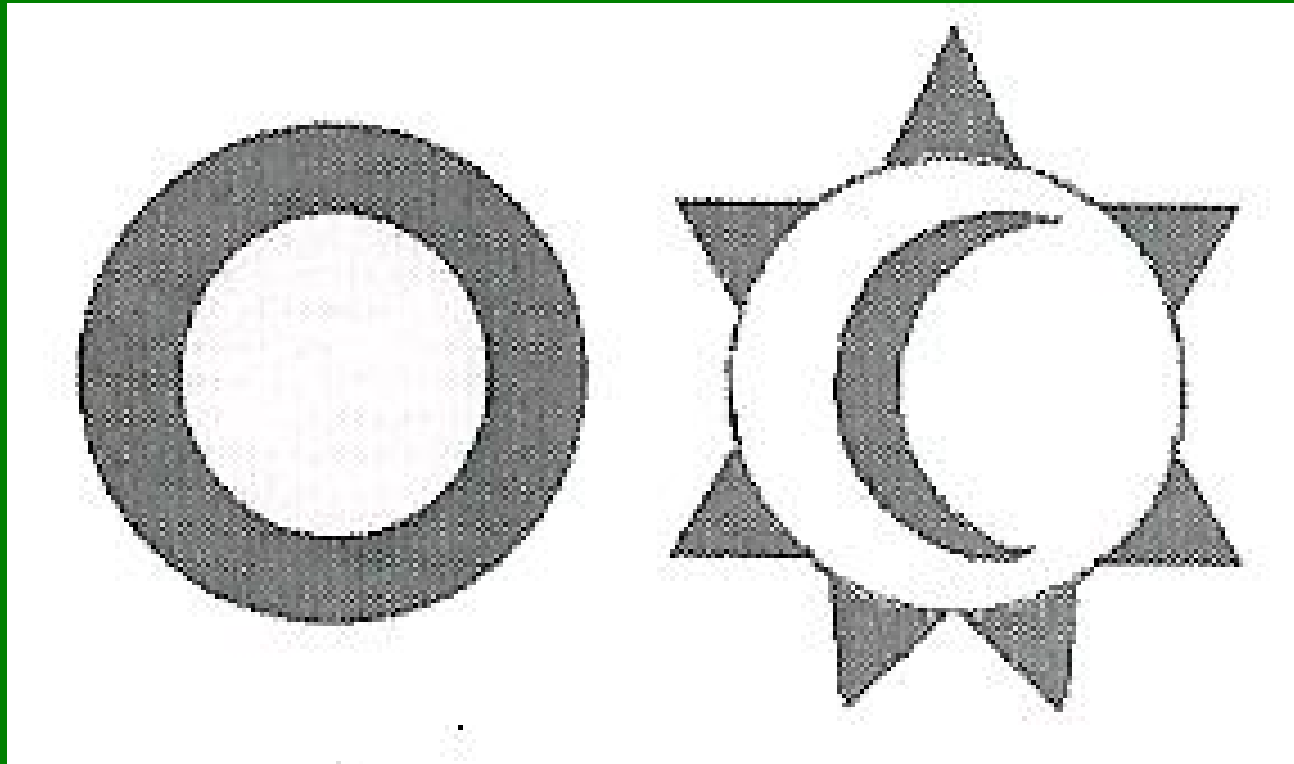




Investiture of Ardashir II (r. 397-383)(center) by the supreme God Ahuramazda (right) with Mithra (left) standing upon a lotus (Ghirshman, 1962 & Herrmann, 1977). Trampled beneath the feet of Ahura-Mazda and Ardeshir II is an unidentified defeated enemy. Of interest are the emanating “Sun Rays” from the head of Mithras. Note the object being held by Mithras. This may be some sort of diadem or even a ceremonial broadsword, as Mithras appears to be engaged in some sort of “knighting” of Ardeshir II as he receives the “Farr” (divine Glory) diadem from Ahura-Mazda.



The Heliodromus(Sun-Runner) as seen in the mosaic isle of the Temple of Mithras at Felicissimus at Ostia, Italy. It is a historical irony that even as the Romans were fighting their enemies the Partians and the Sassanians, they had adopted an ancient Iranic cult from the land of their enemies.



The Khwor or Sun-Disc carried on flagpoles and swords (left) and a possible Mithras symbol from the Sassanian era at right- note inset crescent moon (Farrokh, 2005, pp. 23)

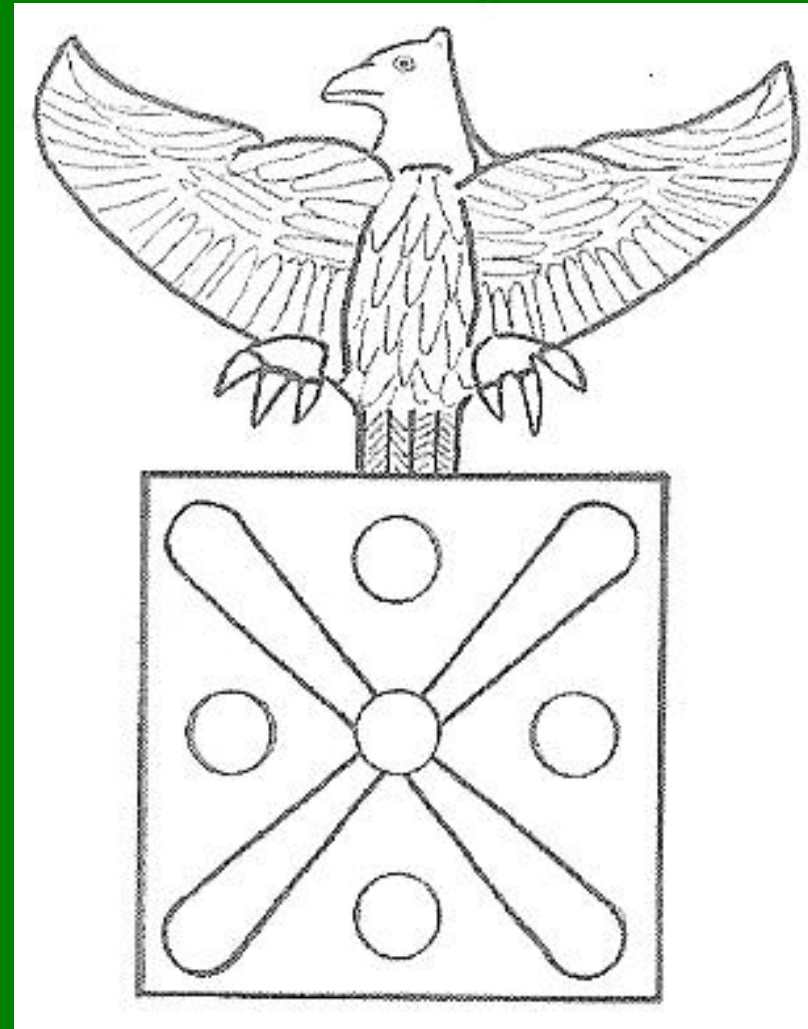


Sassanian disc with head of a lion. This symbol which appeared on banners, continued to be seen as a symbol of Iranian state authority and prowess.

Sassanian ewer with crossed lions; note star on each lion.

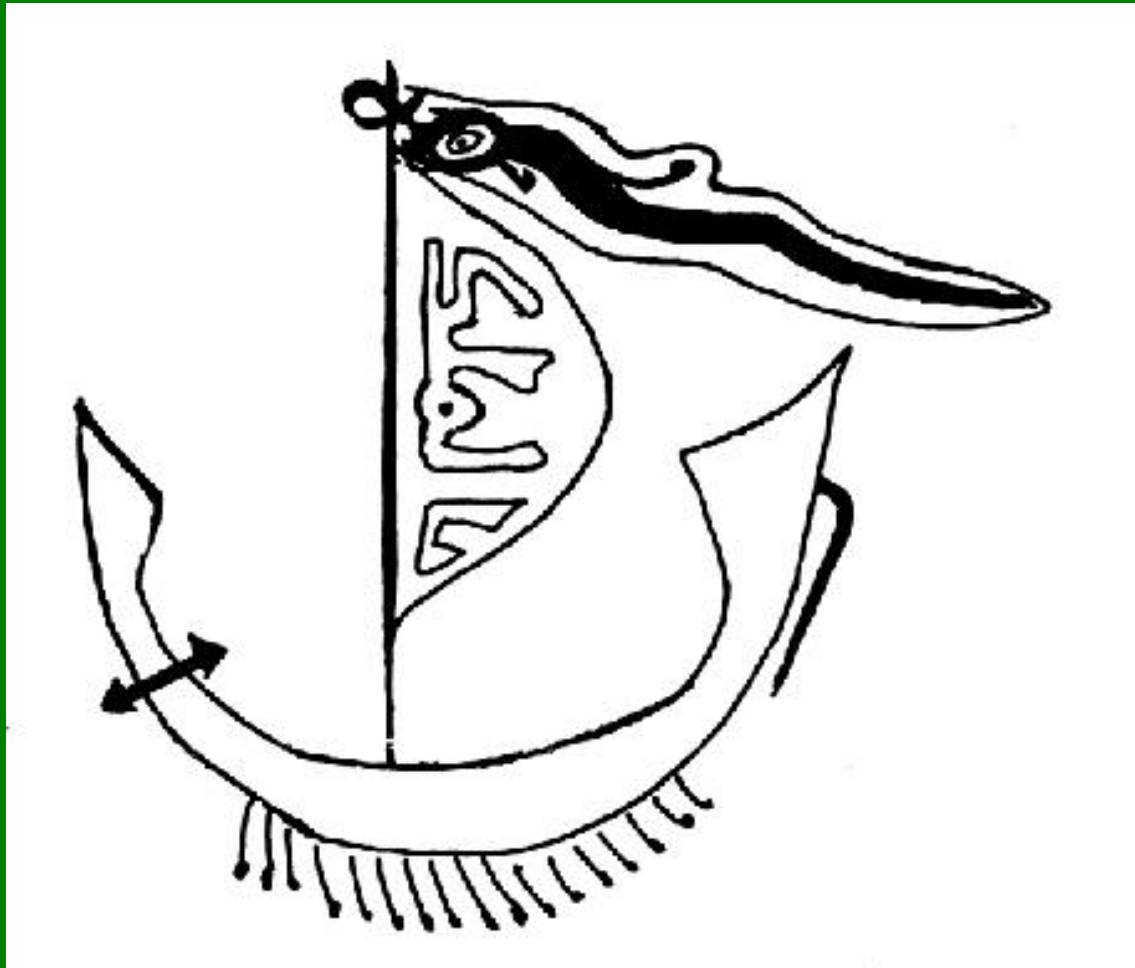


A reconstruction of the Sassanian Royal Standard, the Drafsh-e-Kaviani (Farrokh,2005, pp.22). There were apparently a number of versions of these , however the major national banner measured roughly 16 by 20 feet and was studded with gold, silver and jewels. This was captured Arabo-Islamic forces after the Battle of Qaddisisyah in 637 AD. Note that the above version also displays the eagle which was seen among the royal standards of the Achaemenids, centuries before the Sassanians. The eagle symbol was viewed as a benevolent protector and sign of good heavenly fortune. Harper(1978, pp.84) has noted that Sassanian warriors often adooned their weapons with the feather decoration of the bird-god Varagna.

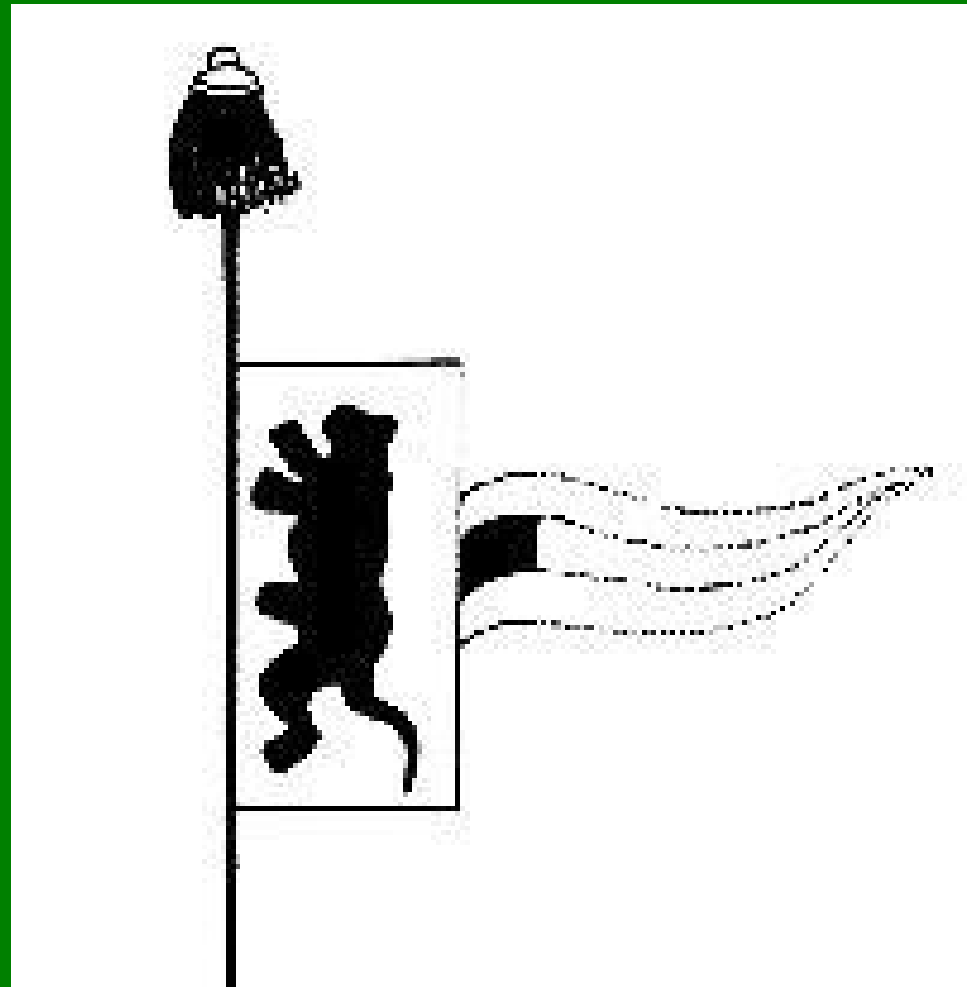


The Pazyryk carpet displays the first depiction of the Drafsh-e-Kaviani. The Pazyryk region was settled by north Iranian Scythian peoples. It is possible that the Partians, who were of Scythian stock, introduced this ancient Iranian theme as Iran's major Standard (photo courtesy of Behdokht and Khosrow Panahi).





One notable example of pre-Islamic Iranian motifs enduring in post-Islamic Turkic-ruled Central Asia is a ceramic work from Nishapur dated to the 9th century AD (two centuries after the fall of Sassanian Persia). The above drawing is from a ceramic work showing a small ship flying a banner showing a Simurgh (Iranian phoenix) or Homa (Iranian Griffin) figure (consult Papadopoulo,fig. 420).



Ghaznavid depiction of the Lion.

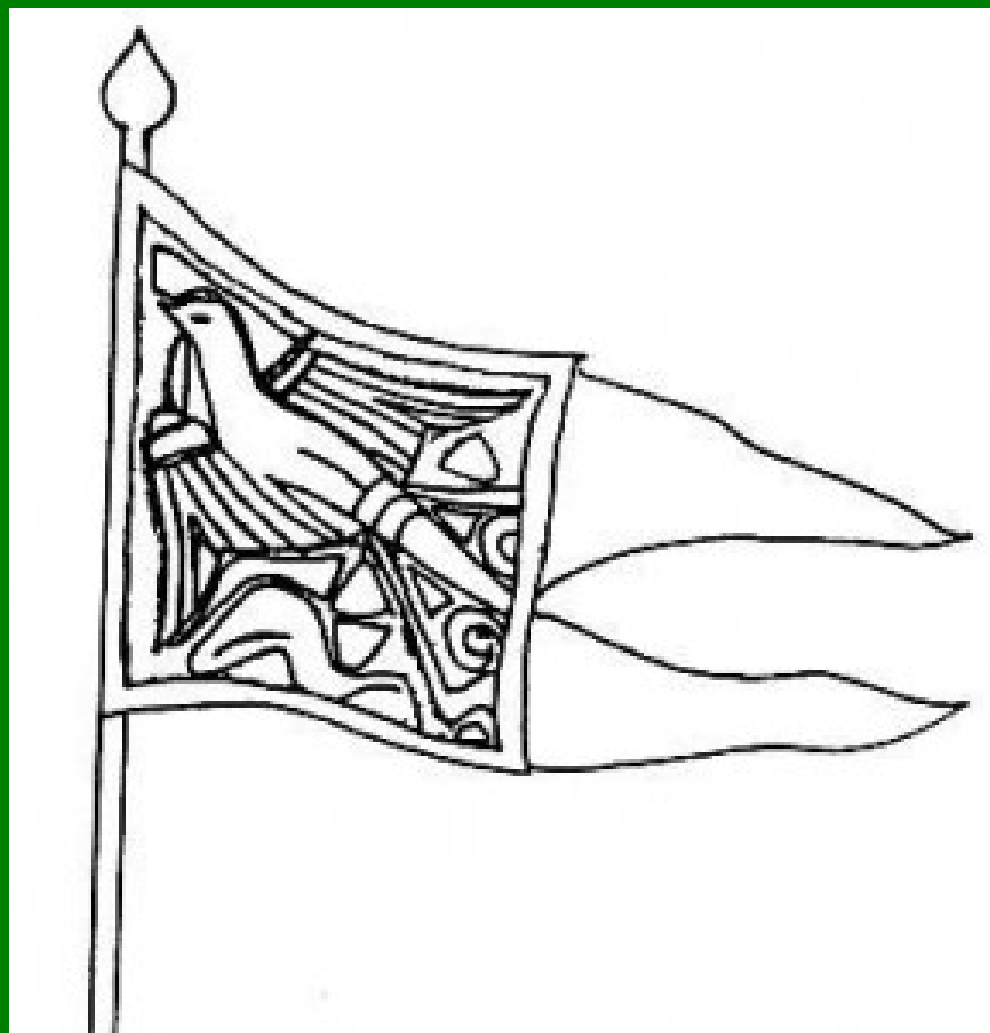


Illustration of the ancient Simurgh (Iranic Phoenix) on banner from the Seljuk era (nafisi, 1949, pp. 57). Seljuk banners also depicted Lions in the Iranian manner



A coin of Sultan Ghiasol-Din Kay-Khosrow in the 13 century (courtesy of Khorasani, 2006, pp. 321).



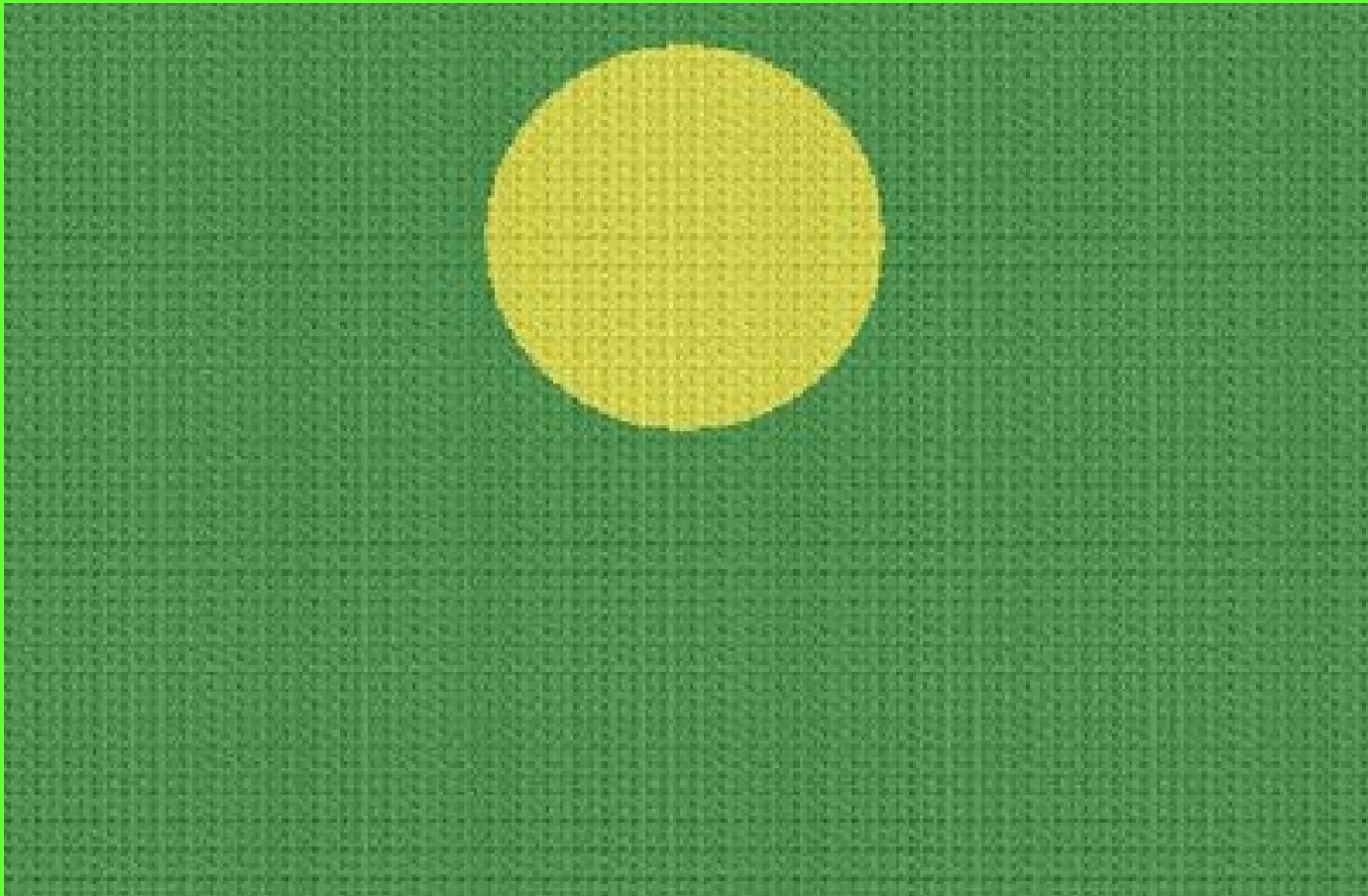
Tile from Iran in 13th century depicting the Lion-Sun motif (Savory, 1976, pp. 245). This image is of great significance as it symbolic of an enduring Iranian tradition of “Farr” (kingly glory) as represented by the Sun (an aspect of the ancient god Mithras) and the lion (symbol of strength, prowess and authority).

The armies of Timur e Lang or Tamerlane (1336- 1405), one of the post- Mongol Turkmen warriors from Central Asia also witnessed the appearance of the simultaneous lion- sun motif. The above depiction is attributed to the year 1450 by Matin (Plate 60).



The “Shir Dar” (Lion Gate/doorway) of the Ismail college at Samarkand built originally in 1627 (Nafisi, 1949, p. 62). The sun motif is characterized by Kriwaczek (2002, picture Plate 1) as “...the image of Mithra, the rising and unconquered sun, Zoroastrian intercessor between God and humanity.” (Courtesy of Kriwaczek, 2002).

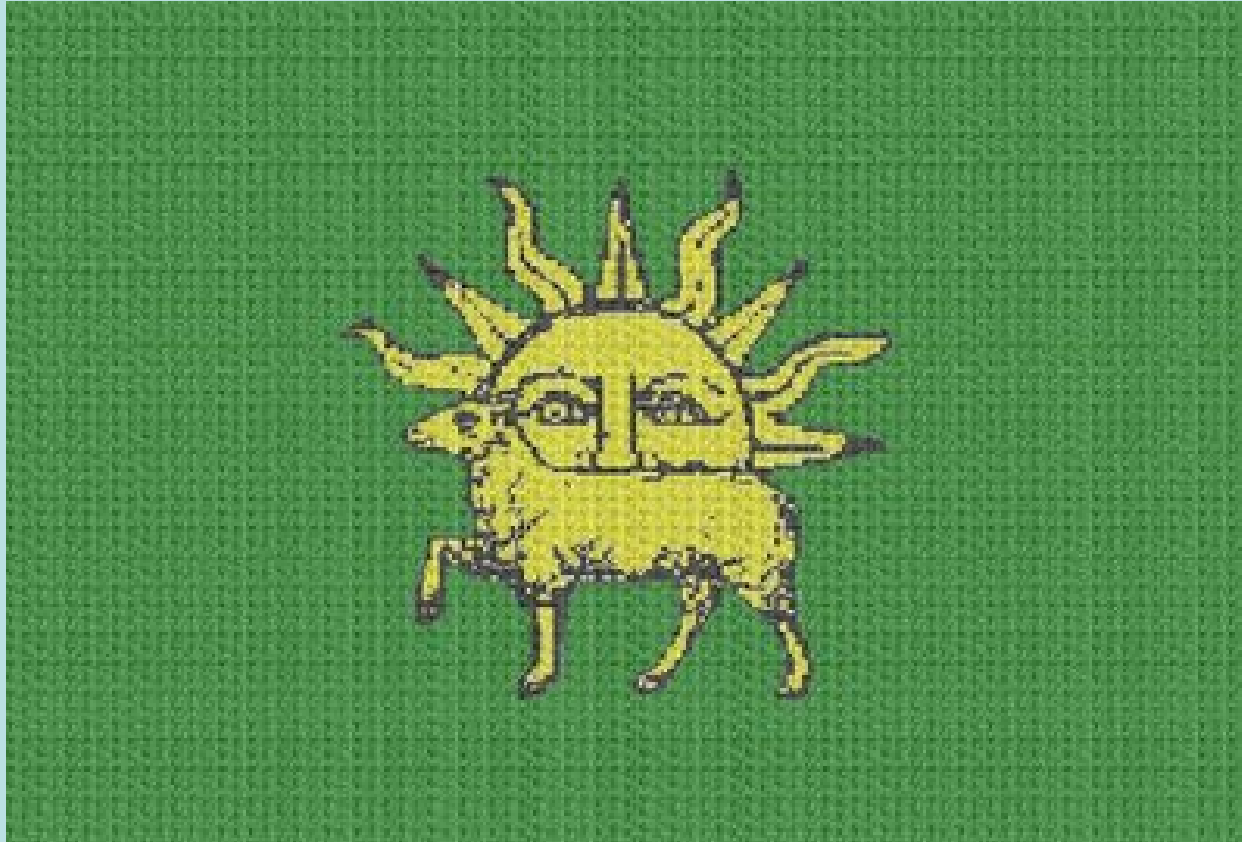




The flag of Iran at the time of Shah Ismail. It was a basic green color inset with the yellow figure of the moon. The Safavid flag however was to soon transform into the Lion – Sun motif, while retaining its green-color background.

A 16th century European portrait of the Safavid dynasty Shah Ismail I (1487- 1524) now housed at the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy. Partially visible Latin lettering states Ismail as the King (note the term “Rex”) of Persia (note the “Per” is evident on the top right side of this Partial photo).





Safavid flag at the time of Tahmasp (1524-1576) son of Shah Ismail. Note the Sun and the ram or ship. The ram or ship was a potent symbol in pre-Islamic Sassanian times and was often used as a banner by the ancient clans of Iran. The ram however was to be permanently displaced by the lion as the symbol of Persia or the Iranian state.



Safavid flag at the time of Ismail II (1576-1578). The lion has now become the primary symbol with the face of the sun rising in the background. Background is Green.

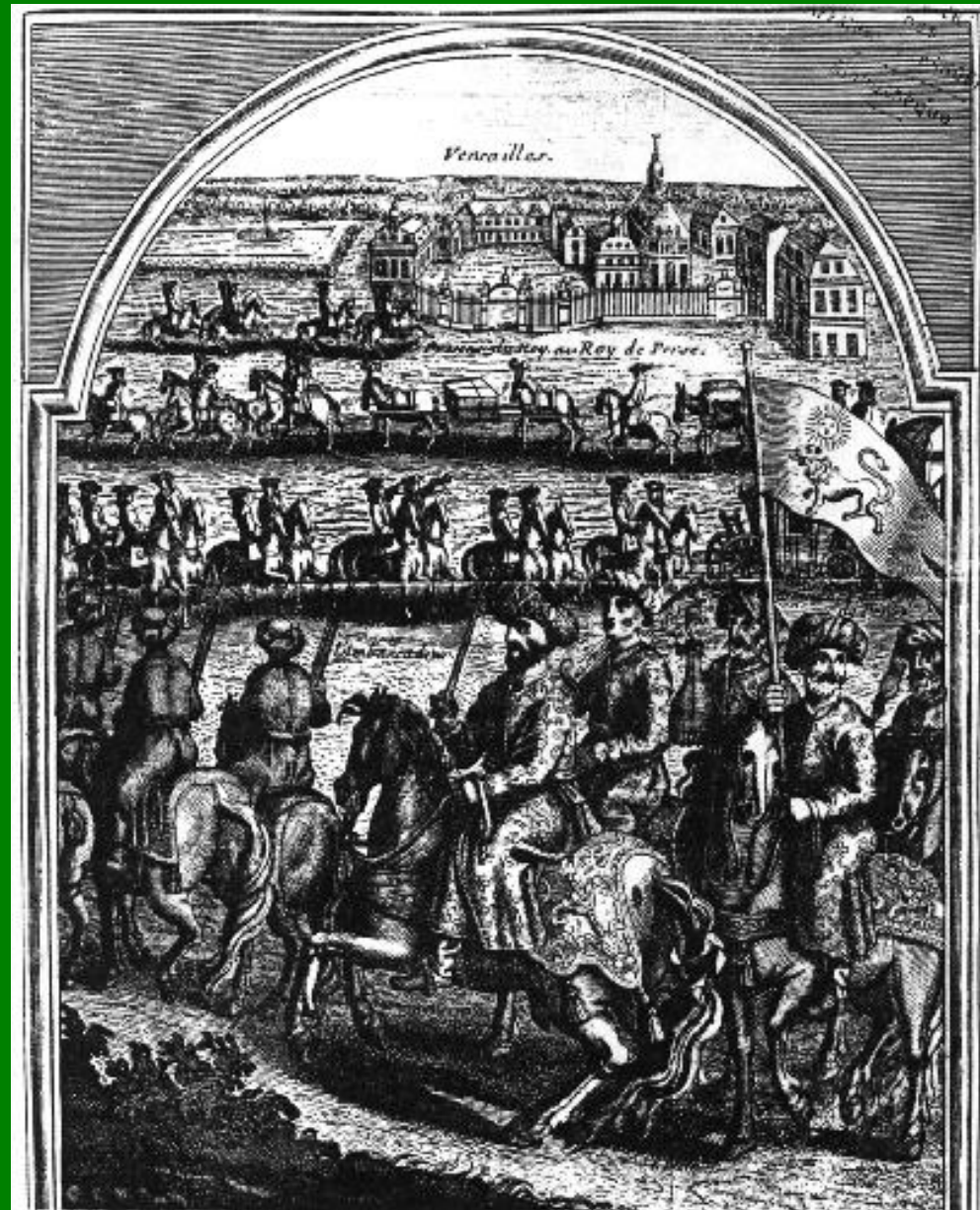
An Iranian army reconstruction in 1971 of a Safavid Alamdar or standard-bearer holding a two-pronged white banner with the lion and sun motif. It is of interest that the Safavid defined these symbols both within a Shahname context as well as Shiite symbols.



The copper engraving shown above of Shah Abbas, made by Dominicus Custos lists him among the Atrium of the heroic “Caesars” of history. Note the Latin inscription at the top of the Plate “Schach Abas Persarum Rex” which translates as “Shah Abbas the great monarch of Persia”. This was in reference to Shah Abbas ‘ victories over the Ottomans. Custos makes a particular emphasis on linking Shah Abbas to the “Mnemonia Cyrus” (the Memory of Cyrus the Great of Persia). The Safavids regarded themselves as the heirs of the Persian Empire, founded by Cyrus the Great (559-530 BC), as corroborated by European sources (Consult Matini 1992).

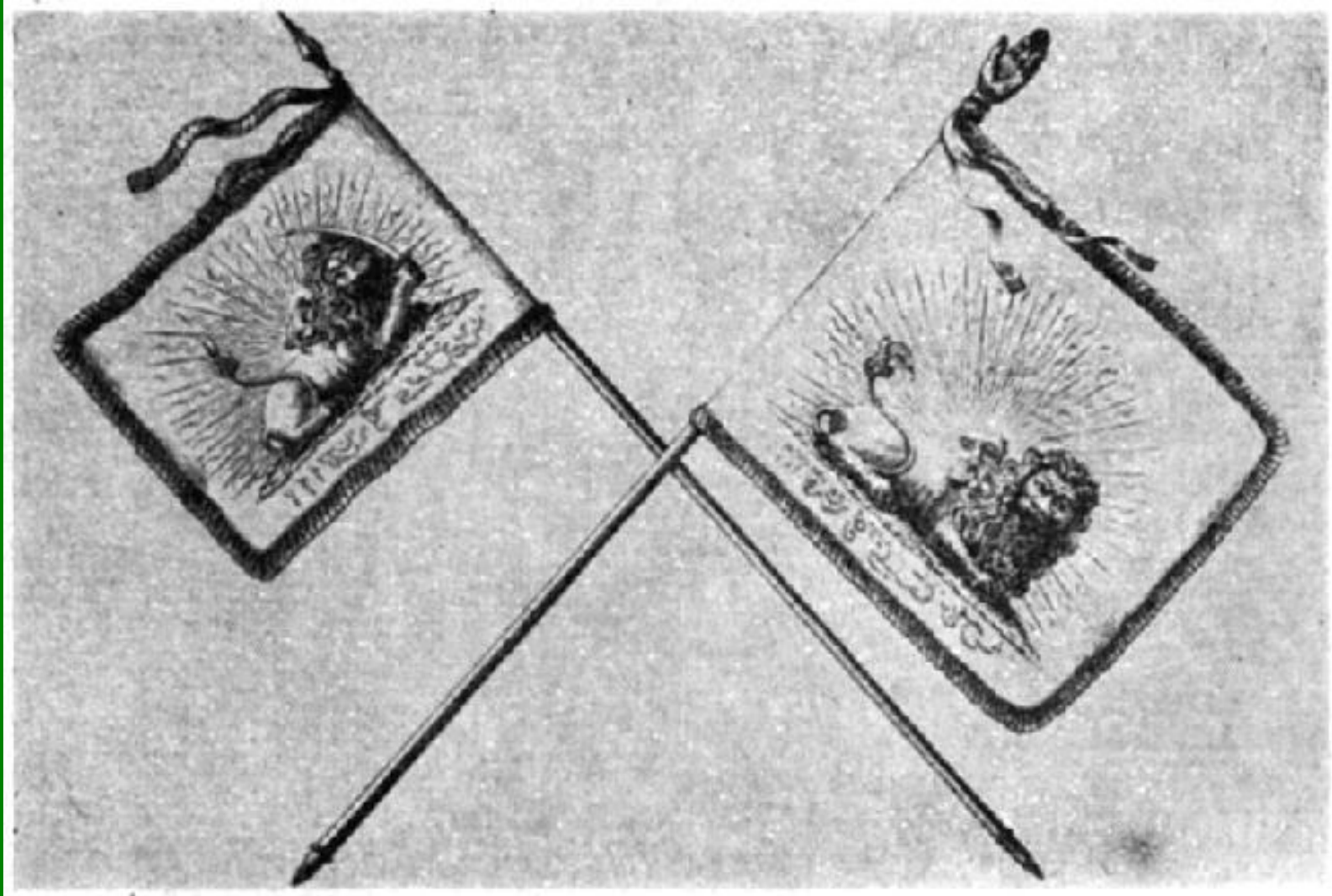


An Iranian delegation led by Mohammad-Reza Beg visits French dignitaries at Versailles, August 1715. Note the Iranian flag with Lion and Sun motif carried by the “Alamdar-Bashi” or standard bearer at Versailles (Consult Herbette, pp. 115 originally in a print in the Gazette de France).





Iranian ambassador Reza Beg enters Paris to a warm welcome by the local French populace. Note the banner with the Lion and Sun motif carried by the standard bearer or “Alamdar-Bashi” (Consult Her bette, 1928, pp. 115, original from the Cabinet des Estampes).



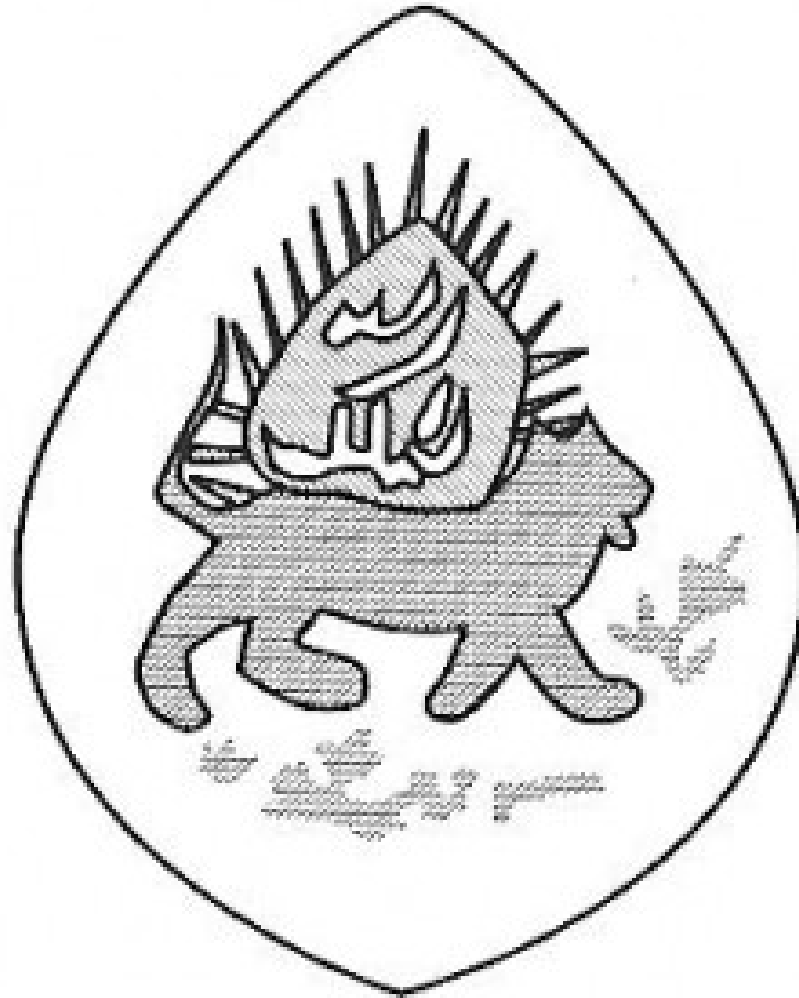
A European drawing of the Iranian flag in the early 19th century (consult Honar o Mardom 31, p. 18, and falsafi, 1955-67, IV, opp. P. 160).

Standard bearer from the time of Nader Shah bearing the Lion and Sun motif (Iranian army reconstruction, 1971). As noted by Axworthy (2006), one of the major reasons for Nader Shah's military successes was due to his use of organized infantry musketry and cannon.



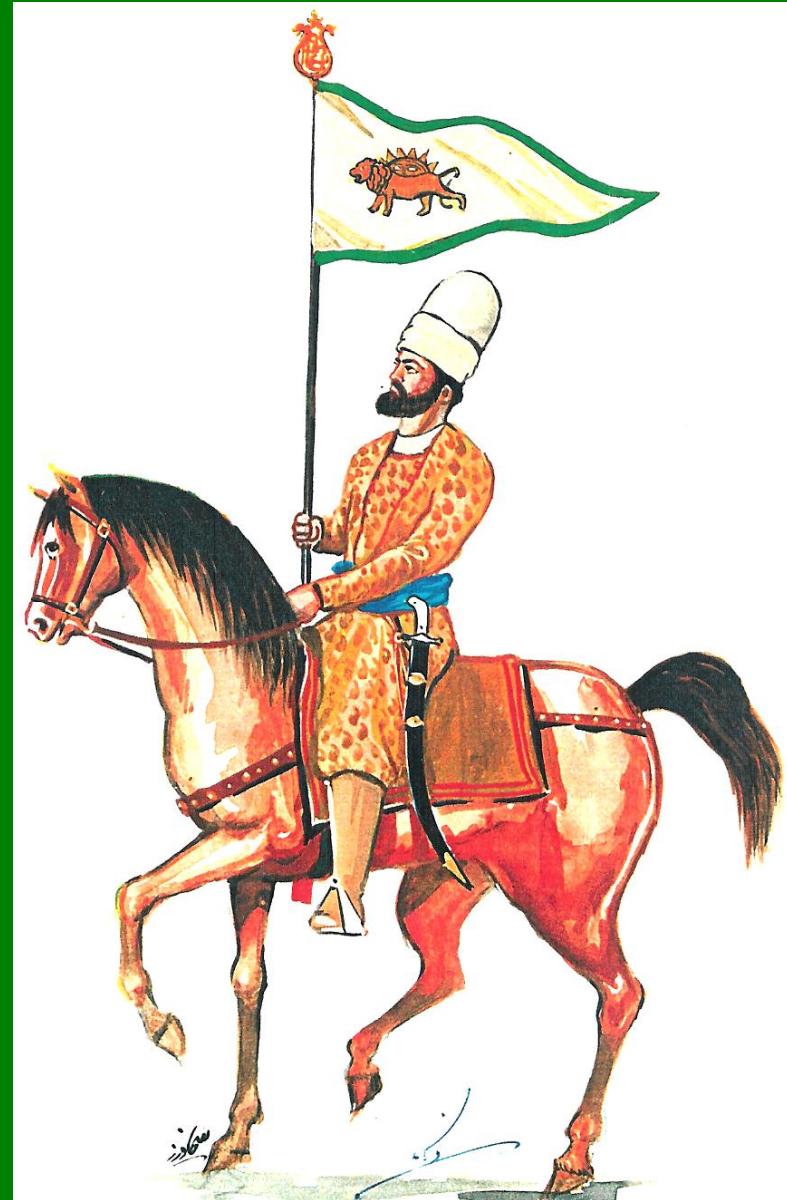
Standard bearer from the time of Nader Shah bearing a multicolor motif (Iranian army reconstruction, 1971). Note the coincidental resemblance of the tri-color to those of the French flag. As noted by Hanway :there was also another banner “...in stripes of red, blue and white, and the other of red, blue, white and yellow, without any other ornaments”(I, p. 248).





Royal seal with Lion and Sun motif during the reign of Nader Shah. Note the word Al-Molkollal (Arabic: The earth as God) within the sun (Courtesy Khorasani, 2006, pp. 326).

Standard bearer from the time of Karim Khan Zand bearing a banner with Lion and Sun motif (Iranian Army reconstruction, 1971).





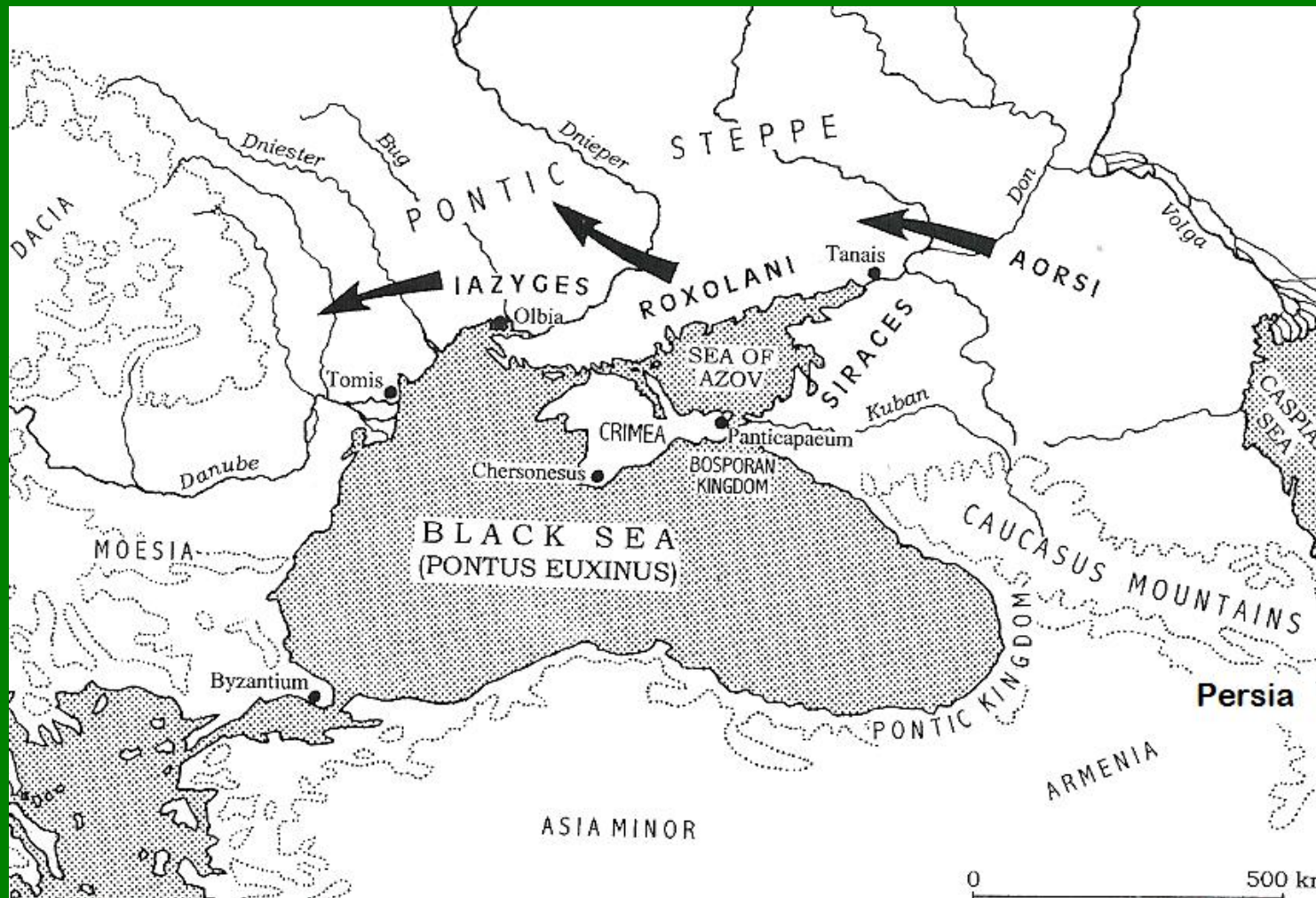
**The Lion-Sun motif as seen on a tombstone dated to the Zand dynasty
(Courtesy of Khorasani, 2006, pp. 326).**



Emblem of the Lion and the Sun on a coin dated to Agha Mohammad Khan (Courtesy of Khorasani, 2006, pp.327). The inscription on the bottom reads “Ya Ali” or “hail Imam Ali”.

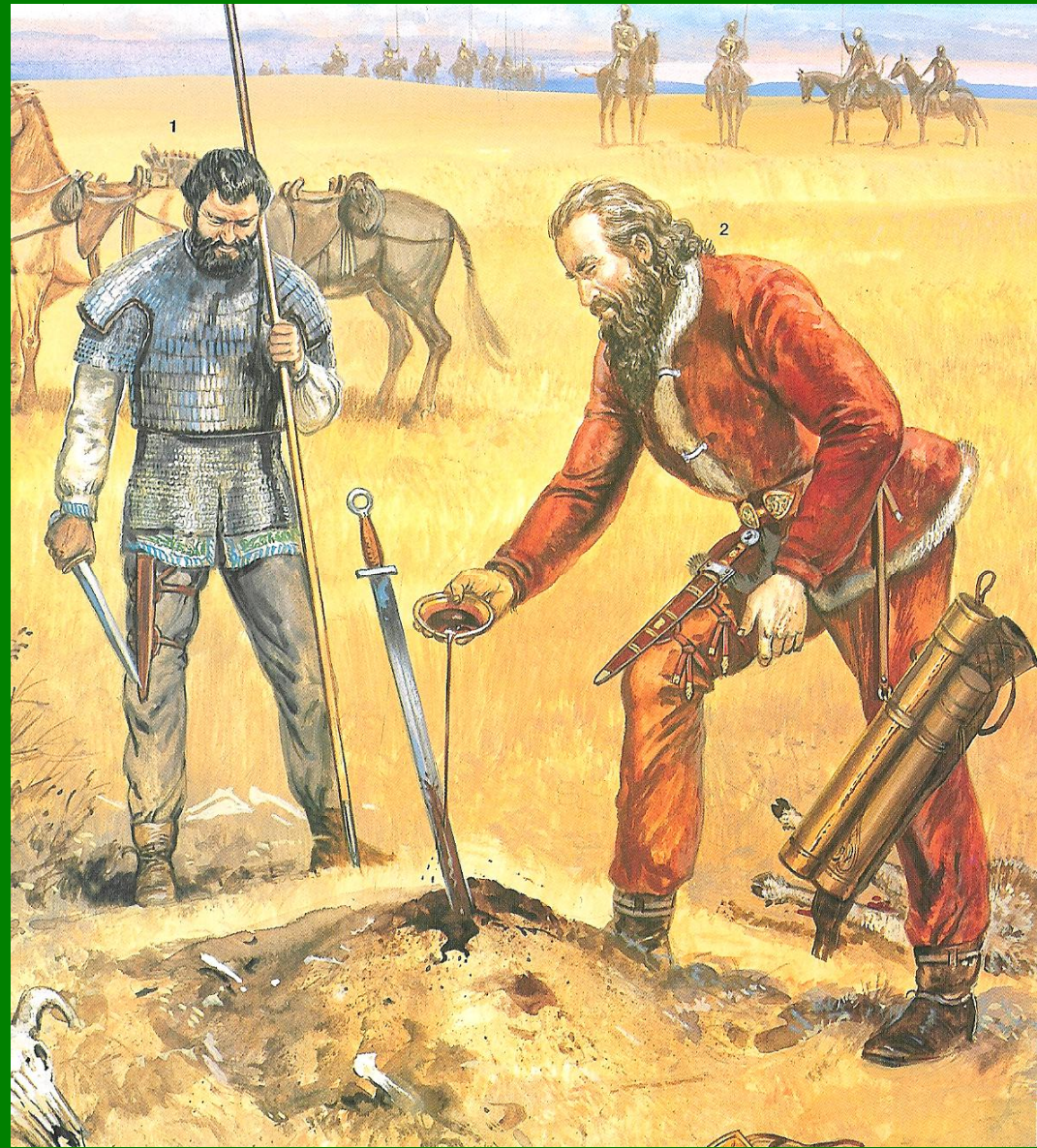
Qajar Standard bearer bearing a red banner with Lion and Sun motif (Iranian Army reconstruction, 1971). There was also a white and green version of the same flag, although the red version was the one used during the Russo-Persian wars. This is a uniform of Abbas Mirza's regular troops in the early 19th century during his wars against Russian expansion into Iranian territories in the Caucasus. The Russians prevailed and forced Iran to yield all her Caucasian possessions in the treaty of Turkmenchai in 1828.





The movement of North Iranian peoples from Eastern Europe and the Caucasus into Central Europe and the Balkans. These arrivals allowed for the transmission of a number of Iranian theological themes such as sword-worship into Europe (Map Courtesy of Brzezinski & Mielczarek, 2002, pp. 7).

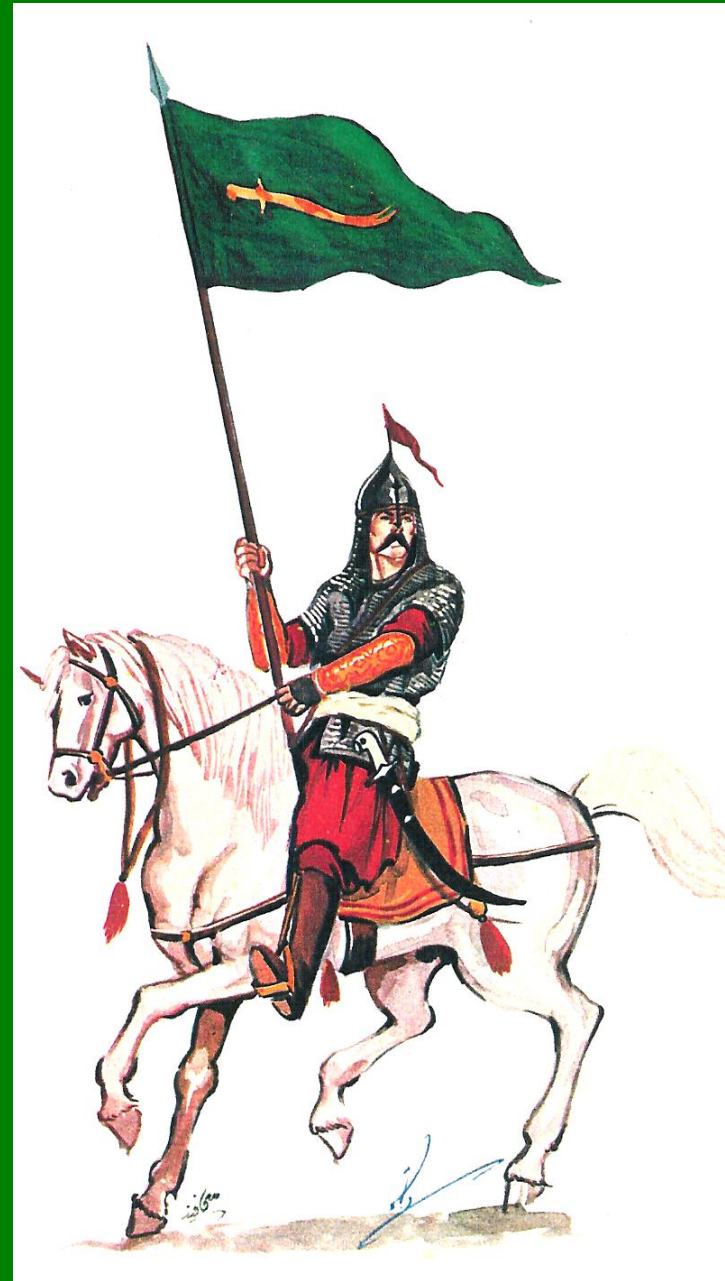
Sarmatian-Alan warriors engage in ancient rituals in the burial of a late comrade. An important ritual was the thrusting of the sword into the earth, a tradition still found in surviving ancient cults in parts of western Iran. The sword was a potent theological symbol in ancient Iranic rites. The above reconstruction is also of interest in that it shows that lamb sacrifice and the spilling of blood have pre-existed among Iranian peoples before the arrival of Islam into Sassanian Persia, Anatolia or the Caucasus (Map courtesy of Brzezinski & Mielczarek, 2002, pp. Plate B).

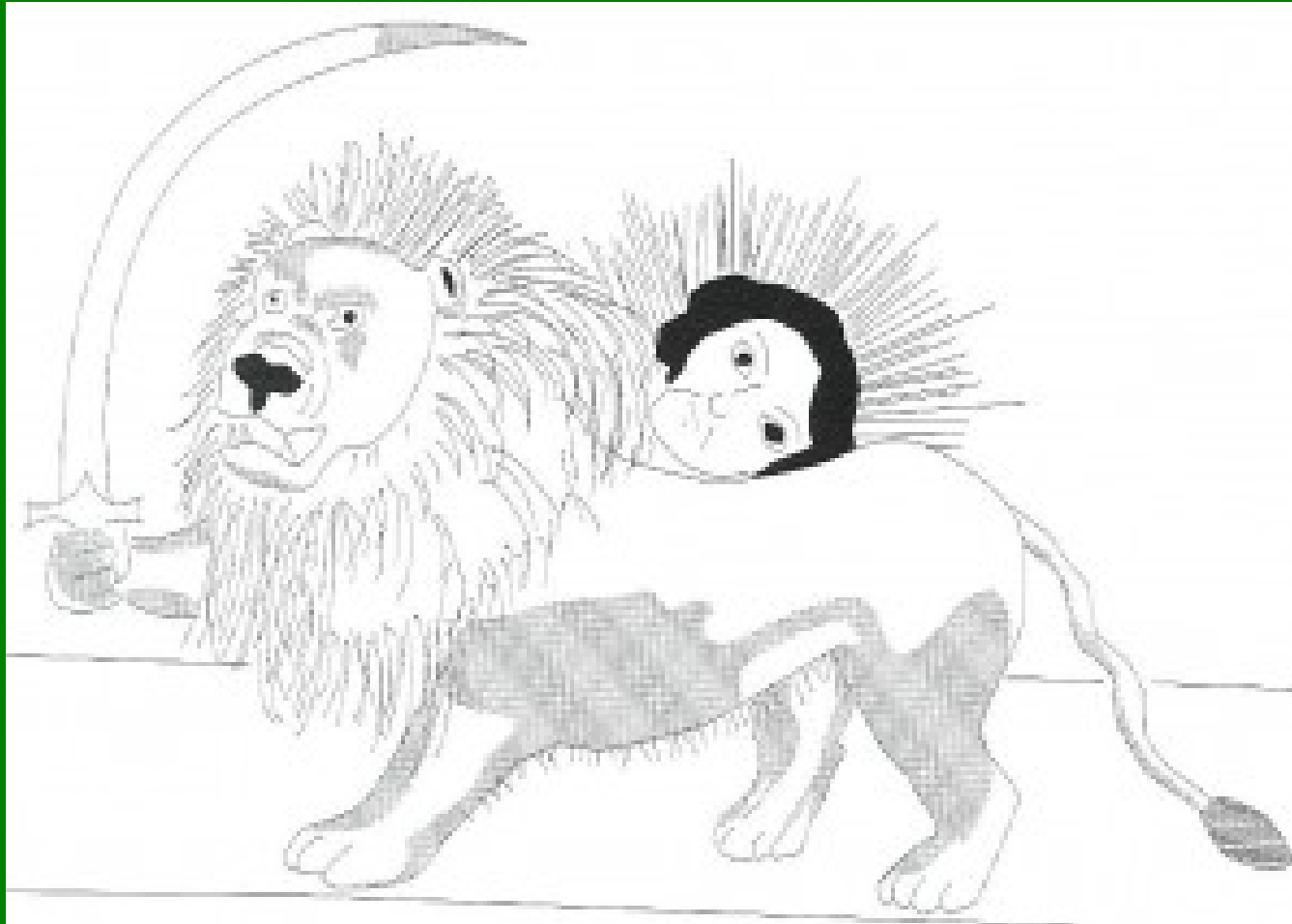




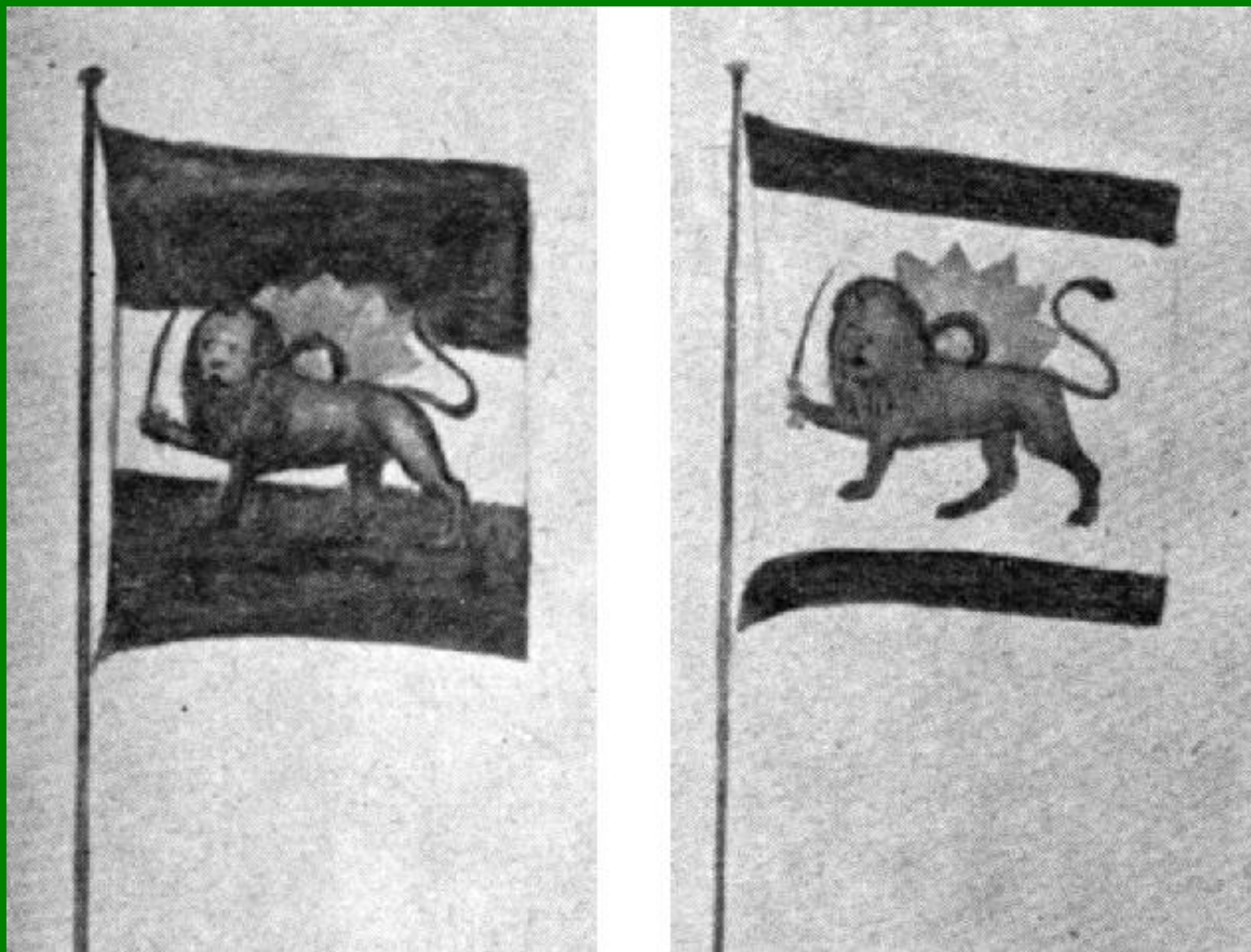
The investiture of Khosrow II at Tagh-e-Bostan. Note the broadsword held by Khosrow II at center, flanked by Ahura-Mazda at right and Goddess Anahita to the left. The straight broad sword appears often in Sasanian arts. It is worth noting that the Qajars also carved reliefs at Tagh-e-Bostan, perhaps in an endeavor to associate their dynasty with more ancient Iranian icons.

A Safavid Alamdar or standard bearer carrying a banner with the Zolfaqhar sword of Imam Ali one of Shiite Islam's most revered figures. (Iranian Army reconstruction, 1971). Note that the original Arabo-Muslims did not carry the curved sword at the time of the Muslim conquests- their swords were straight like those carried by the Romano-Byzantines and the Sassanians during the 7th century. The sabre is a later Turkic invention during the post-Islamic era.





The lion and sun motif as seen in a newspaper during the reign of Nasser e Din Shah Qajar (1831-1896)(Courtesy of Khorasani, 2006, pp. 330). Note that the lion is now rampant and wielding a curved sword.



Qajar flags by 1886. Though not evident here both have the green color on top, white in the middle and red at the bottom. The version of the flag at the right was designed by statesman Amir Kabir (1807-1852) probably sometime between 1848-1852. It was the “equal stripe width” version at the left which gained Prominence from the late 1800s onwards.



Another view of the Amir Kabir version of the Iranian flag. This was the forerunner to the “equal stripe width” version discussed above.



Constitutional troops fight in the name of democracy against Qajar Royalists and their Russian allies in Tabriz, sometime in 1906. Note that these troops fight under the Iranian flag. Note that the colors are of equal width.



The Iranian flag from 1925-1964



The Iranian flag from 1964-1979. Note the addition of the wreath and the crown. The Sun in this case is visible but somewhat diminished compared to earlier versions of the Iranian flag seen in pre-Islamic, pre-safavid, Safavid, Afsharid, Zand and Qajar eras.



The Iranian flag from 1979.



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