


Proposal to Encode the ‘Fravahar’ Symbol in Unicode

Anshuman Pandey
 Department of Linguistics
 University of California, Berkeley
 Berkeley, California, U.S.A.
 anshuman.pandey@berkeley.edu

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1 Introduction

This is a proposal to encode a symbol associated with Zoroastrianism and the cultural legacy of Iran in Unicode. The character is proposed for inclusion in the block ‘Miscellaneous Symbols and Pictographs’ (U+1F300). Basic details of the character are as follows:



glyph	code point	character name
	U+1F9xx	FRAVAHAR

The representative glyph is derived from an image available on Wikimedia Commons, which was released into the public domain: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Faravahar-Gold.svg>. The actual code point will be determined if the proposal is approved.

2 Background

In the proposal “Emoji Additions” (L2/14-174), authored by Mark Davis and Peter Edberg, five ‘religious symbols and structures’ among symbols of other categories were proposed for inclusion as part of the Emoji collection in Unicode. Shervin Afshar and Roozbeh Pournader proposed related symbols in “Emoji and Symbol Additions – Religious Symbols and Structures” (L2/14-235). These characters were approved for inclusion in the standard by the UTC in January 2015. No mention was made of symbols associated with Zoroastrianism, but these do exist. This proposal seeks to encode the FRAVAHAR, one of the most important and recognizable of Zoroastrian symbols. Encoding the FRAVAHAR in Unicode will enable Zoroastrians worldwide to represent a motif of their religious tradition on digital platforms on par with adherents of other religions.


3 Description

The symbol  proposed here is commonly known as *fravahar* in the Zoroastrian community in Iran and the Parsi community in India (Zoroastrians in India are commonly known as ‘Parsi’). The Zoroastrian *fravahar* is based upon the ‘winged disc’ or ‘winged sun’ motif  that was used in ancient Egyptian, Hittite, Assyrian, and Iranian cultures. The ‘winged sun’ has been proposed for encoding as a separate symbol (see Pandey 2015a). Both the *fravahar* and the ‘winged sun’ were used in Iran during Achaemenid rule from the 6th century BCE to 330 BCE. During this period, the *fravahar* was used primarily in depictions of Achaemenid kings. It is not known exactly when the *fravahar* became associated with the teachings of Zarathustra or ‘Zoroaster’ (c. 6th century BCE). The Zoroastrian scholar K. E. Eduljee states that usage of the *fravahar* diminished after the Achaemenid dynasty ended and the symbol was not actively used until the 18th century, at which time it was revived as a symbol of the Zoroastrian religion (2013: 1). Today, the *fravahar* is recognized by Zoroastrians around the world as the representative symbol of their faith. It is also used in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where it represents the historical and cultural legacy of the country.

The *fravahar* motif consists of two major components. The first is the ‘winged disc’. Wings extend out from the sides of the disc towards the right and left, and consist of three rows of feathers. A tail descends from the bottom of the disc, which also consists of three rows of feathers. Two legs extend from the lower sides of the disc downward to the right and left. The second element is a figure that is placed within the disc as if rising out from it. The figure is always depicted in profile, facing either to the right or the left of the observer. The eye, nose, and mouth are generally visible in detail upon its face. The figure is bearded and sometimes shown with a moustache. It is shown wearing a cap and a robe. Both arms and hands are visible. The arm facing the observer is raised at a 45° angle with a flat hand. The opposite arm is placed at a 90° angle parallel to the top of the wing and a ring is clutched in the hand.

The word *fravahar* is derived from Avestan *fravaši* and may be related to Old Persian **fravarti*, terms that refer to a supernatural being (Boyce 2000). It is not known if the symbol represented the *fravaši* during the Achaemenid period, but the relationship between the two is prominent in Zoroastrian iconography. In Zoroastrianism, the symbol represents two concepts: the *fravaši* and the *khvarenah*. The *fravaši* (= Modern Persian *fravahr*) is conceptualized as the personal spirit of an individual and the spiritual companion of *urvan*, or ‘the soul’. The *khvarenah* (= modern Persian *farr*) refers to divine or royal glory and also the divine grace that an individual should strive for. Western scholars have interpreted the *fravahar* as representing Ahura Mazda, the fundamental spirit, but Zoroastrians do not regard this to be valid.

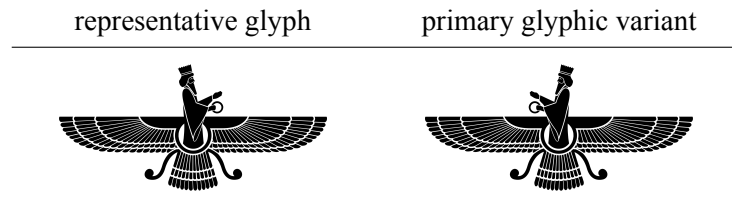
Modern Zoroastrians ascribe meaning to the various elements of the *fravahar* motif. The figure rising out of the center ring represents the soul. The center ring represents the eternal nature of the universe and the soul. The three rows of feathers on the right and left wings represent the Zoroastrian maxim: “good thoughts” (Av. *humata* = MP. *andīsh-e nīk*), “good words” (Av. *hukhta* = MP. *guftār-e nīk*), and “good deeds” (Av. *hvarshata* = MP. *kirdār-e nīk*). The three rows of feathers in the tail represent the opposite: “bad thoughts” (Av. *dushmata*), “bad words” (Av. *duzukhta*), and “bad deeds” (Av. *duzvarshata*). The leg on the side towards which the figure is facing represents positive and creative energy, while the opposite leg represents negative and destructive energy. The raised hand points towards the heavens and shows the way forward. The ring clutched in the other hand represents loyalty and faithfulness.

The FRAVAHAR is used today as a common marker of Zoroastrian culture. It is placed on the façades of Parsi fire temples (‘*agiar*’) in India for signifying a place of worship, often alongside the  *ātashdān* “fire-holder” (proposed for encoding in Pandey 2015b). The FRAVAHAR is also used in printed materials and in logos of Zoroastrian and Parsi associations. It is also a symbol of Iran’s cultural and historical legacy. It has been used on postage stamps, as a relief on mausoleums, and on the façades of government buildings. The FRAVAHAR is also popularly worn as a pendant.

4 Glyphic Variants

4.1 Primary glyphic variant

The representative glyph for the FRAVAHAR is right-facing. The primary glyphic variant is left-facing. There is no known semantic difference between the two. There are also colored variants (see figure 5).



5 Character Data

Character Properties Properties in the format of `UnicodeData.txt`:

```
1F9xx;FRAVAHAR;So;0;ON;;;;N;;;;
```

Linebreaking Linebreaking properties in the format of `LineBreak.txt`:

```
1F9xx;ID      # So      FRAVAHAR
```

Names List Names list information in the format of `NamesList.txt`:

```
@      Zoroastrian symbol
1F9xx  FRAVAHAR
      = fravashi, fravard, fravahr, frohar, faravahar, farohar
```

6 References

Afshar, Shervin; Roozbeh Pournader. 2014. “Emoji and Symbol Additions – Religious Symbols and Structures” (L2/14-235). <http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2014/14235-relig-sym.pdf>

Boyce, Mary. 2000. “Fravaši”. *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. X, fasc. 2, pp. 195–199. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/fravasi->

Davis, Mark; Peter Edberg. 2014. “Emoji Additions” (L2/14-174). <http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2014/14174r-emoji-additions.pdf>

Eduljee, K. E. 2013. “Farohar / Fravahar Motif: What Does It Represent? Use of Icons and Symbols in Zoroastrianism”. Abridged ed. *Zoroastrian Heritage Monographs*. West Vancouver, Canada. <http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/reference/FaroharMotif-Eduljee.pdf>

Pandey, Anshuman. 2015a. “Proposal to Encode the ‘Winged Sun’ Symbol in Unicode” (L2/15-100). <http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2015/15100-winged-sun.pdf>

———. 2015b. “Proposal to Encode the ‘Atashdan’ Symbol in Unicode” (L2/15-105). <http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2015/15105-atashdan.pdf>

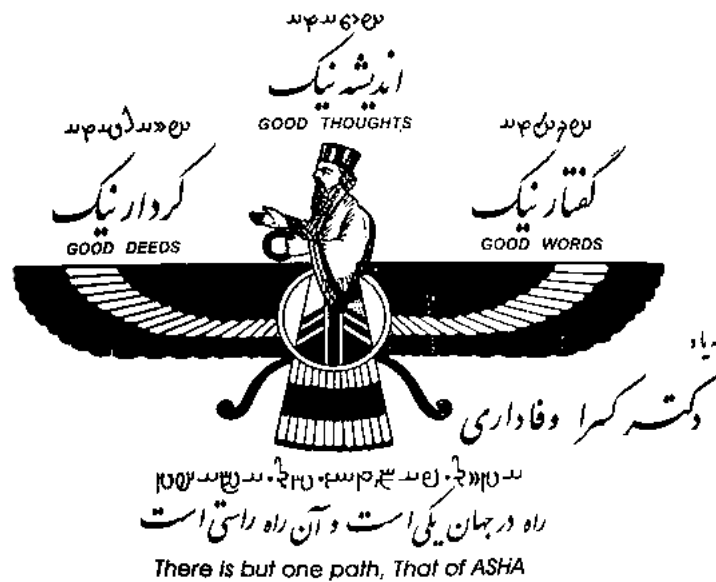
Figure 1: The *fravahar* surrounded by text in Avestan, Persian, and English.Figure 2: Description of the *fravahar* in German.



Figure 3: Collection of religious symbols showing the *fravahar* (highlighted in bronze).



Figure 4: Collection of religious symbols showing the *fravahar* (circled in red).

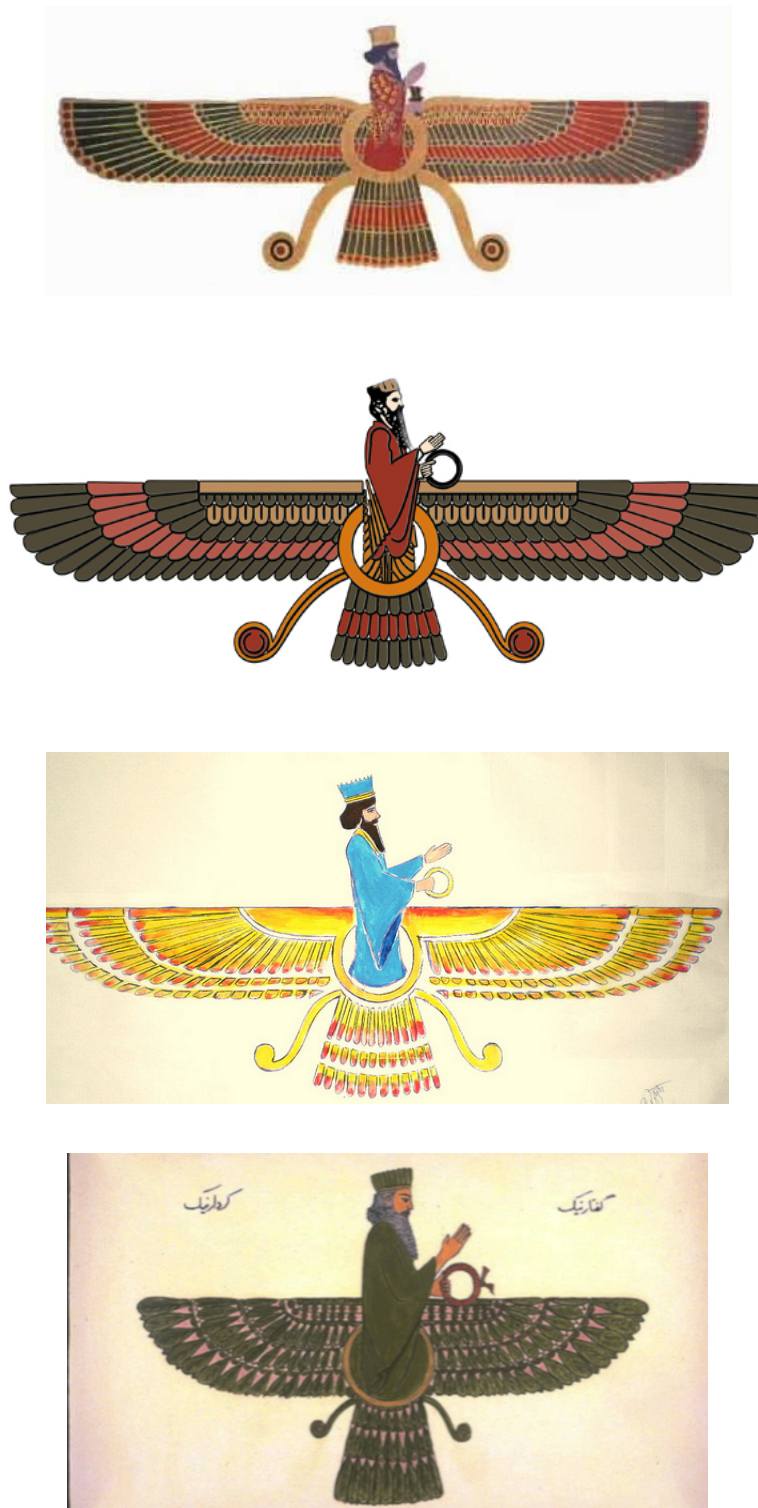


Figure 5: Various colorizations of the *fravahar*.

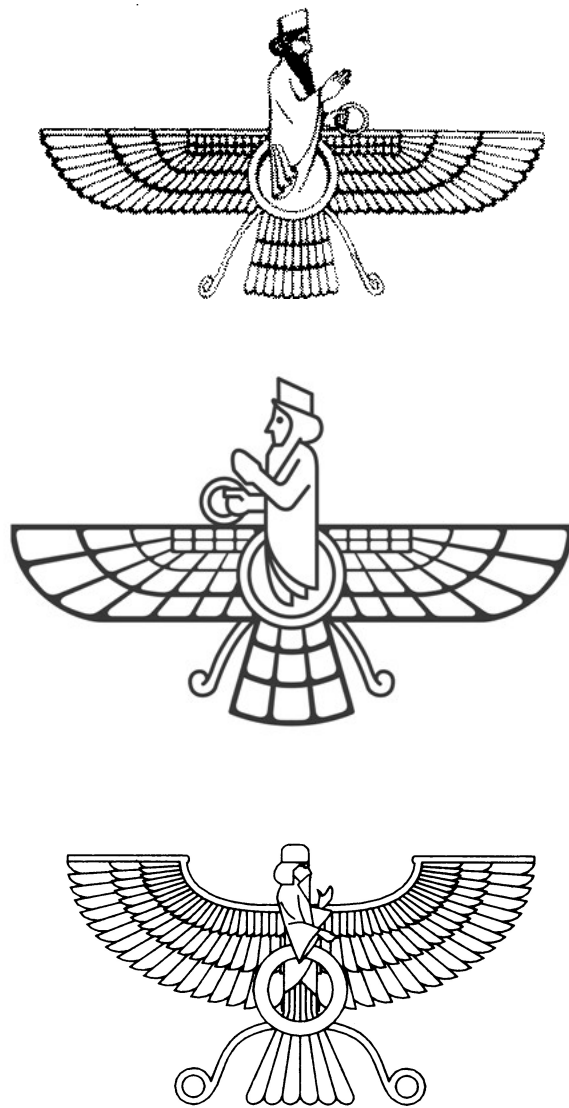


Figure 6: Outline drawings of the *fravahar*.



Figure 7: A relief of a right-facing *fravahar* on monument in Persepolis (from Wikipedia: File:Persepolis__carved_Faravahar.JPG).



Figure 8: A relief of a left-facing *fravahar* on monument in Persepolis (from Wikipedia: File:Farvahar.JPG).



Figure 9: A relief of a left-facing *fravahar* on the *atashkadeh* “fire temple” in Yazd, Iran (from Wikipedia: File:Faravahar Atashkadeh Yazd.jpg).



Figure 10: Picture of a *fravahar* statue at the Parsi fire temple built in 1896 in in Aden, Yemen.



Figure 11: A right-facing *fravahar* rendered as a stained glass window at a Parsi fire temple in Calcutta, India.



Figure 12: A relief of the left-facing *fravahar* at a Parsi fire temple in Karachi, Pakistan.

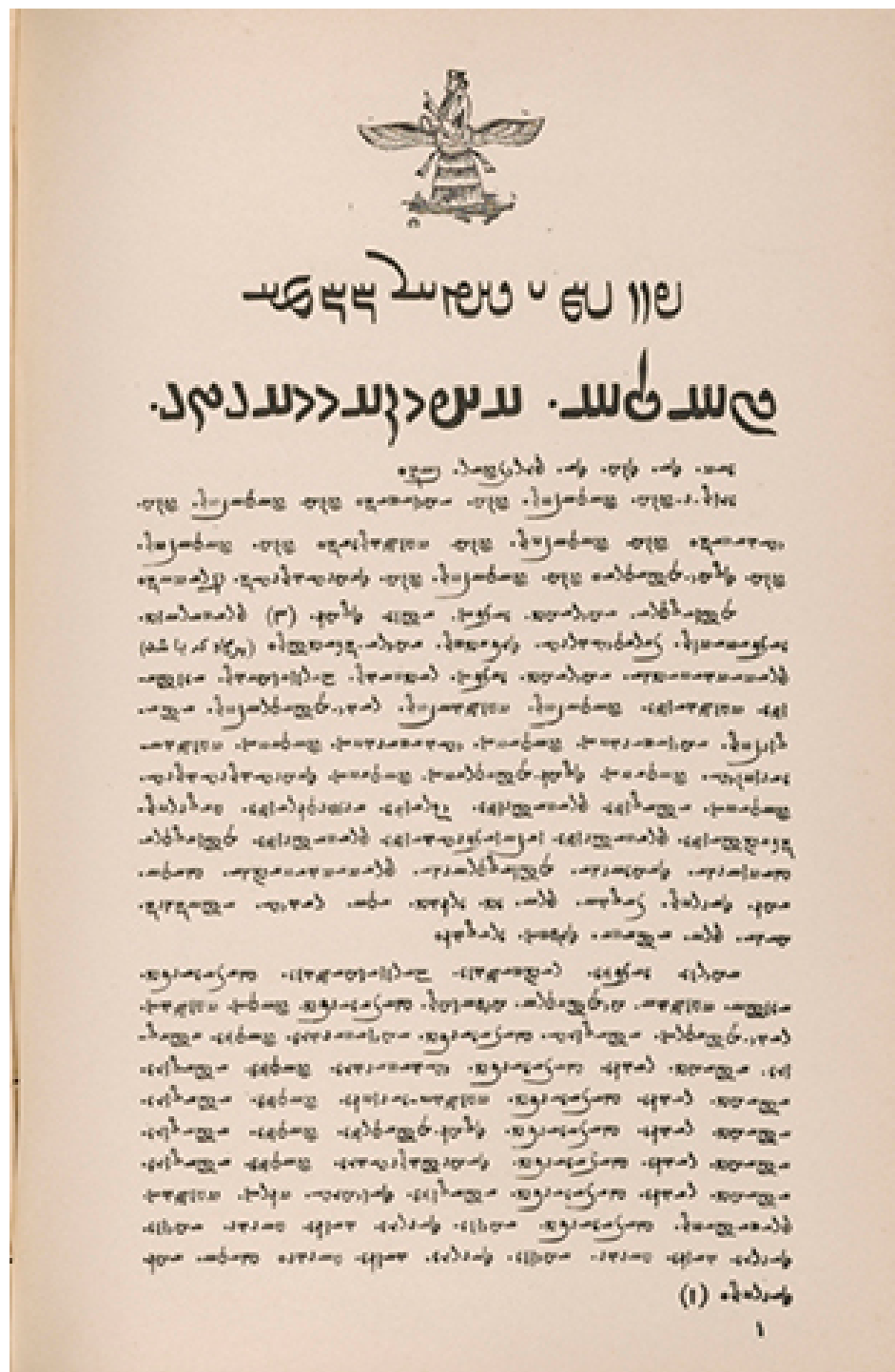


Figure 13: A left-facing *fravahar* above a chapter title in a printed edition of the *Gāthās* (from Pūr Davūd, *The Hymns of The Holy Gathas*, Bombay: Fort Printing Press, 1927).



Figure 14: A right-facing *fravahar* on the logo of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North American (FEZANA).



Figure 15: Stylized rendering of a left-facing *fravahar* on the logo of the XVII North American Zoroastrian Congress.



Figure 16: A left-facing *fravahar* on the front façade of the mausoleum built in the 1930s for the 11th century poet Firdowsi at Pus, Iran (from Wikipedia: File:Tomb of Ferdowsi - Front facade.jpg).



Figure 17: The *fravahar* on stamps commemorating the coronation of Ahmad Shah Qajar (1915).



Figure 18: The *fravahar* on the façade of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tehran, Iran.



Figure 19: The *fravahar* on pendants. The top two and bottom left images show metal renderings of the symbol. The bottom left image shows a *fravahar* pendant paired with a pendant in the shape of the geopolitical boundaries of Iran, emblazoned with the colors of the Iranian flag. The bottom right image shows the *fravahar* as part of a pendant in the shape of Iran's borders, bearing the colors of the country's flag.