

Proposal to encode the Zoroastrian symbol ‘Fravahar’ in Unicode

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1 Introduction

This is a proposal to encode the *fravahar* symbol in Unicode. It may be allocated to the ‘Supplemental Symbols and Pictographs’ (U+1F900) block alongside other characters related to religion and faith.



FRAVAHAR

The *fravahar* symbol originated in Iran during the 6th century BCE. It was used as an official symbol by kings of the Achaemenid dynasty (6th century BCE to 330 BCE) and is prominently displayed on their monuments at Persepolis (fig. 5). Its association with the teachings of Zarathustra or ‘Zoroaster’ (c. 6th century BCE) may also have emerged during this time. According to K. E. Eduljee (2013), common usage of the symbol diminished after the end of Achaemenid rule, but it was revived in the 18th century as the representative symbol of the Zoroastrian faith.

Today, the *fravahar* is used and recognized by Zoroastrians and Parsis around the world as the primary motif and emblem of their faith and culture. It adorns the façades of fire temples (*atashkadeh*, ‘agiary’) and other places of worship in India, Iran, and Pakistan (fig. 6, 7). The *fravahar* is also used in printed materials, such as the *Avesta* (fig. 8). It is incorporated into logos of Zoroastrian and Parsi associations (fig. 9).

The *fravahar* is also used as a secular symbol in Iran, where it denotes the cultural and historical legacy of the country. It has been used officially on postage stamps (fig. 11) and on the façades of government buildings (fig. 12). It is also embossed on mausoleums and other memorials in the country (fig. 10). The *fravahar* is popularly worn as a solitary pendant or alongside other related symbols (fig. 13).

2 Justification for Encoding

Unicode contains several characters that are emblematic representations of the world’s religions, as well as characters that represent specific significant articles or concepts of faith within these traditions:

Buddhism	☸	U+2638 WHEEL OF DHARMA
Christianity	✝	U+271D LATIN CROSS
	✙	U+2626 ORTHODOX CROSS
	🏛	U+26EA CHURCH
	☮	U+1F54A DOVE OF PEACE
Hinduism	ॐ	U+1F549 OM
	🕌	U+1F6D5 HINDU TEMPLE
Islam	☪	U+262A STAR AND CRESCENT
	🕌	U+1F54C MOSQUE
	🕌	U+1F54B KAABA
Judaism	✡	U+2721 STAR OF DAVID
	🕯	U+1F54E MENORAH
	✡	U+1F52F DOTTED SIX-POINTED STAR
	🕍	U+1F54D SYNAGOGUE
Other	☼	U+269B ATOM SYMBOL
	☮	U+262E PEACE SYMBOL
	🕌	U+1F6D0 PLACE OF WORSHIP
Sikhism	☪	U+262C ADI SHAKTI
Shinto	㊦	U+26E9 SHINTO SHRINE
Taoism	☯	U+262F YIN YANG

Moreover, several of these have emoji representations, which permit adherents of these traditions and philosophies to communicate their expressions of faith and belief:



Despite such wide representation of the world’s religions, there is no character in Unicode that expresses the Zoroastrian faith. The *fravahar* is recognized worldwide as an emblem of the Zoroastrian faith and is incorporated into numerous depictions signifying major religions across the globe (fig. 3). This proposal to encode the *fravahar* seeks to expand the set of characters used for symbolic and iconic representations of traditional, religious, and other aspects of non-western cultures, societies, and traditions. Encoding the *fravahar* will enable Zoroastrians and Parsis — as well as Iranians and others who ascribe meaning to the symbol — to depict, display, and transmit a symbol that conveys a multitude of historical, cultural, and religious significance.


3 Description of the *fravahar*

3.1 Name

The word *fravahar* is derived from Avestan 𐬫𐬀𐬯𐬭𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬀 *fravaši* and may be related to Old Persian **fravarti*, a term that refers to a supernatural, divine, or angelic entity (Boyce 2000). The name ‘*fravahar*’ is commonly used, although there are numerous historical and dialectal variations in spelling due to morphological changes and differing romanization conventions: *fravashi*, *fravard*, *fravahr*, *frohar*, *faravahar*, *farohar*. The primary spelling variant is *faravahar*, which represents schwa insertion to break the initial cluster in *fravahar*.

3.2 Features


The *fravahar* motif consists of two major components: a ‘winged disc’ and an anthropomorphic figure holding a disc.

- The ‘winged disc’ or ‘winged sun’ motif  was used in ancient Egyptian, Hittite, Assyrian, and Iranian cultures. In the *fravahar*, the wings extend horizontally outwards from the right and left bearings of the disc. The wings are typically detailed with three rows of feathers. A feathered tail descends from the bottom of the disc. The tail generally consists of three columns of feathers. Two appendages extend and curve downwards from the lower right and left bearing of the disc.
- 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 closest to the observer is placed at a 90° angle parallel to the top of the wing and a ring is clutched in the hand. The opposite arm is raised at a 45° angle with an open hand with palm facing the observer.

3.3 Iconography

In Zoroastrianism, the symbol embodies 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 (MP) *farr*) refers to divine or royal glory and also the divine grace that an individual should strive for.

Modern Zoroastrians ascribe meaning to all features of the *fravahar* motif.

- The figure residing in the center of the winged disc is a personification of the soul. It is an anthropomorphic entity, but it does not represent Ahura Mazda, the name of the Zoroastrian deity; Zarathustra; or any other deity or prophet. It is a generic entity that represents the personification of divinity or royalty, but no specific ecclesiastical or historical deity or regent. Depiction of the figure is not controversial, and may be likened to any anthropomorphic being, such as the figure rising out of the oil lamp in the  U+1F9DE GENIE
- The ring of the winged disc 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. *duzvarshta*).
- 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.

3.4 Glyphic representations

A conventional representation of the *fravahar* is:



As portrayed above, the common representation of the *fravahar* is right-facing; however, a left-facing form is also used. In this variant, the symbol is simply flipped horizontally without any other modifications. There is no semantic difference in the orientations:



right-facing



left-facing

On account of the detailed features and shape of the symbol, its attributes and dimensions may be adjusted in order to accommodate display at small sizes or to meet restrictions of glyph widths in fonts. Generally, such adjustments consist of reducing the width of the wings, or scaling down the size of the ‘winged disc’ and amplifying the entity at the center. Of course, typographers and vendors may design the glyph in accordance with their standards. However, the glyph should contain the features that define the unique iconicity of the symbol, as described in the preceding sections.

Shown below is an acceptable depiction with reduced wing width. This form has been selected as the representative glyph:



An outline form is also acceptable:



Other modifications that emphasize specific features are also common. The following examples are acceptable portrayals of the *fravahar* rendered in an outline form and modified for small displays, but which convey its iconicity:



The *fravahar* is also depicted using coloration, as shown below. These are to be considered stylistic variants of the black and white form.



The *fravahar* is not proposed as an emoji character. However, as the first proposed Zoroastrianism symbol, it may be represented as a ‘property’ so that it may be used alongside other ‘religion’ symbols in the Unicode Emoji set. If the *fravahar* is to be depicted as an emoji, it is recommended that it be represented in the style of the other religious symbols. For emoji, the outline or abstract depictions are most appropriate because they highlight the primary features of the symbol and provide for easy identification. An example emoji representation of *fravahar*, in the style of Apple’s religious symbols, are as follows:



This emojiified *fravahar* is shown below, interfiled with other religious symbols:



4 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
```

5 References

Boyce, Mary. 2000. “Fravaši”. *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. X, fasc. 2, pp. 195–199.

<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/fravasi->

Edujlee, 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-Edujlee.pdf>

Pandey, Anshuman. 2015. “Proposal to Encode the ‘Fravahar’ Symbol in Unicode” (L2/15-009).

<https://www.unicode.org/L2/L2015/15099-fravahar.pdf>

Wikimedia Commons. <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Faravahar-Gold.svg>

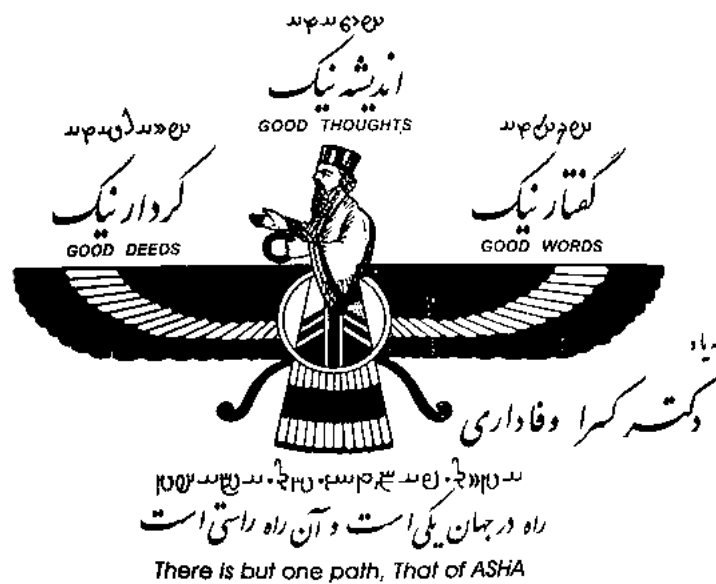


Figure 1: The *fravahar* surrounded by text in Avestan, Persian, and English.



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).



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



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

Figure 5: The *fravahar* relief on various monuments at Persepolis.



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



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

Figure 6: Physical representations of the *fravahar* used as designations for fire temples.



A right-facing *fravahar* rendered in stained glass at a Parsi fire temple in Calcutta, India.



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

Figure 7: Physical representations of the *fravahar* used as designations for fire temples.

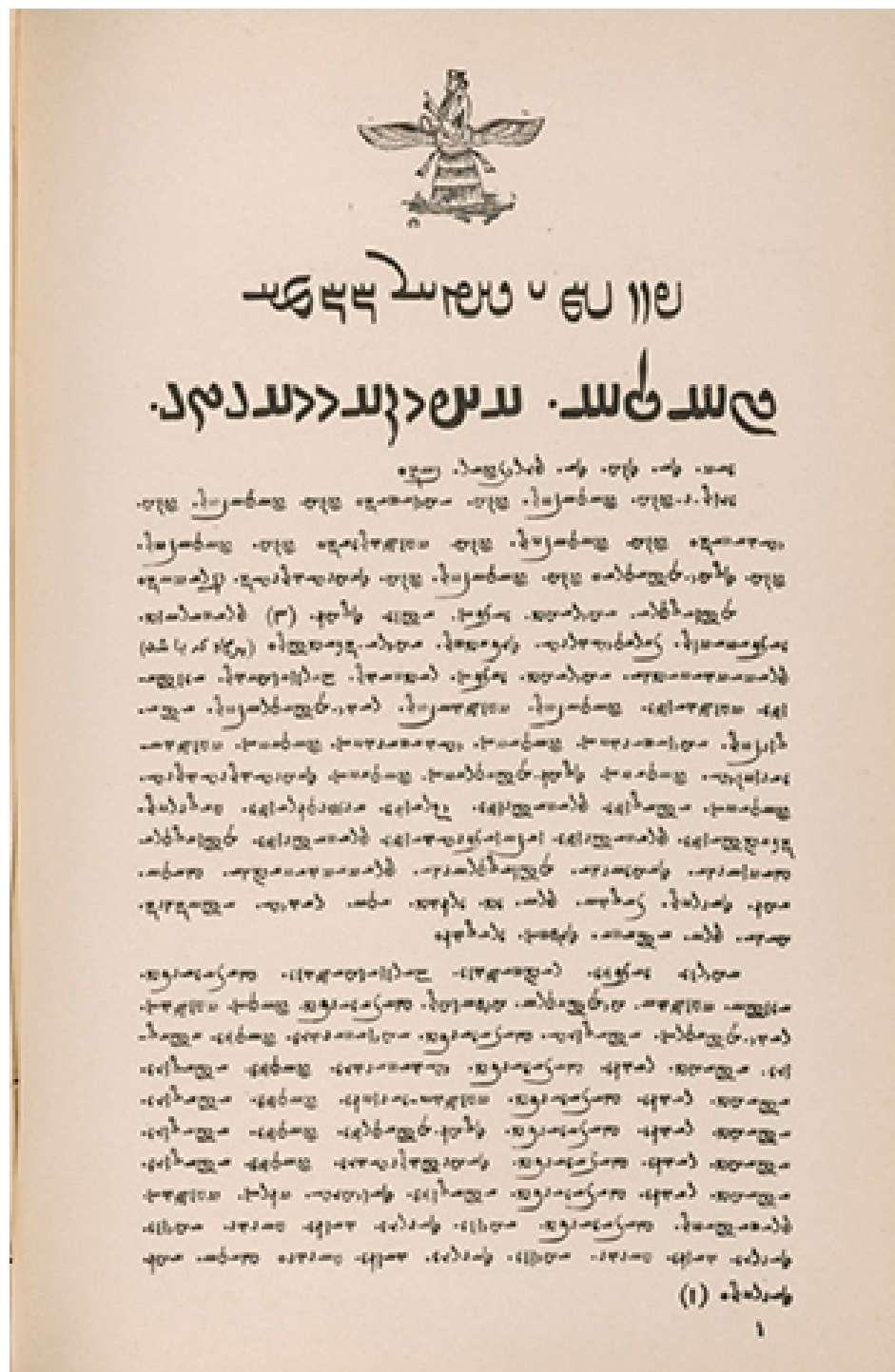


Figure 8: A left-facing *fravahar* above a chapter title in a printed edition of the *Gāthās* (from Pūr Davūd, *The Hymns of The Holy Gathas*, Bombay: Fort Printing Press, 1927).



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



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

Figure 9: Usage of the *fravahar* in logos of Zoroastrian organizations.



Figure 10: 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 11: The *fravahar* on stamps commemorating the coronation of Ahmad Shah Qajar (1915).



Figure 12: The *fravahar* on the façade of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran, Tehran.



Figure 13: 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.