


Proposal to Encode the ‘Atashdan’ Symbol in Unicode

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1 Introduction

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


glyph	code point	character name
	U+1F9xx	ATASHDAN



The representative glyph is derived from an image found at <http://symboldictionary.net/?p=1797>. The actual code point will be determined if the proposal is approved. If both the ATASHDAN and FRAVAHAR (proposed for encoding in L2/15-099) are accepted, then they should be assigned contiguous code points.

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 ATASHDAN, a symbol that represents the sacred, eternal fire in Zoroastrianism. It is commonly used by Zoroastrians for marking places of worship. The symbol may also be used for representing concepts of fire or fire altars used in other faiths. Encoding the ATASHDAN in Unicode will enable Zoroastrians worldwide to represent an important concept of their religious tradition on digital platforms on par with adherents of other religions.

3 Description

The  ATASHDAN is the fire-holder used in Zoroastrianism as the receptacle of the *ātaš* “sacred fire”. The *ātašdān* is also referred to as *ādurgāh*, *ātašgāh*, and *ādišt*; and is known as *kalak* among the Zoroastrians of Yazd and as *magreb* among those of Kerman (Boyce 1987). Historically, there were several types of Zoroastrian fire-holders constructed of various materials and of various statures, but the modern *ātašdān* is a generally mid-sized metal urn, such as that found in Parsi fire temples of today. The representative glyph for the proposed character is based upon a graphical rendering of a metal urn with rising flames. The Zoroastrian scholar K. E. Eduljee states that the fire-holder “has been a consistent Zoroastrian ‘symbol’ for about a thousand years — from Median-Achaemenid royal carvings to the coins of the Sassanian era Zoroastrian sovereigns; from Anatolia (Central Turkey today) in the west, to Kyrgyzstan in the east and Sistan in the south” (2014: 15).

In Zoroastrian iconography the *ātašdān* often appears alongside the  *fravahar* or the  ‘winged sun’ in various contexts, such as in emblematic representations of Zoroastrian culture and upon the façades of Parsi fire temples (these two symbols have also been proposed for encoding; see Pandey 2015a, 2015b). The *ātašdān* is used in the logos of Zoroastrian and Parsi associations and institutions. It is also used in festive ephemera, such as greeting cards for the Zoroastrian holiday Khordad Saal, the birth anniversary of Zarathustra or Zoroaster. The *ātašdān* is also used as a point-of-interest icon on maps for indicating ‘agiaries’ or Parsi fire temples.

There are minor glyphic variants of the proposed ATASHDAN character, which differ in their representations of the pot, the shape of the flames, and the number of flames. The symbol may be rendered in grayscale, color, and outline. These are shown in the accompanying figures.

The ATASHDAN may be considered to be derived from the same archetype as the astrological sign  U+26B6 VESTA. The symbol VESTA is used for denoting 4 Vesta, one of the largest asteroids in the solar system. The asteroid is named after Vesta, the Roman goddess of home, hearth, and family; a cognate of Hestia (*Ἑστία*), the Greek goddess of “the fire of the hearth”. The symbol VESTA invokes the iconic attributes of Vesta’s association with fire and hearth. The glyphic representations of ATASHDAN and VESTA both contain a vessel out of which a fire or flame arises. Nonetheless, the two symbols represent different concepts in different domains of usage.

4 Character Data

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

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

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

```
1F9xx;ID # So ATASHDAN
```

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

```
@ Zoroastrian symbol
1F9xx ATASHDAN
= adurgah, atashgah, adisht, kalak, maghreb
* the receptacle of the sacred fire
= atash bahram, atash adaran, atash dadgah
* used for denoting a fire temple
= atash bahram, atashkadeh (agiyari), dar-e mehr
```

5 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. 1987. "Ātašdān". *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. III, fasc. 1, pp. 7–9. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/atasdan-zoroastrian-pahlavi-place-of-fire-fire-holder-designates-the-altar-like-repository-for-a-sacred-wood-fire-i>
- Davis, Mark; Peter Edberg. 2014. "Emoji Additions" (L2/14-174). <http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2014/14174r-emoji-additions.pdf>
- Eduljee, K. E. 2014. "Farohar / Fravahar Motif: What Does It Represent? Use of Icons and Symbols in Zoroastrianism". May 2014 ed. Zoroastrian Heritage Monographs. West Vancouver, Canada. <http://www.heritageinstitute.com/zoroastrianism/reference/FaroharMotif-Eduljee.pdf>
- Pandey, Anshuman. 2015a. "Proposal to Encode the 'Fravahar' Symbol in Unicode" (L2/15-099). <http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2015/15099-fravahar.pdf>
- . 2015b. "Proposal to Encode the 'Winged Sun' Symbol in Unicode" (L2/15-100). <http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2015/15100-winged-sun.pdf>



Figure 1: A poster of symbols of the major religions practiced in India, annotated in Gujarati. The *ātašdān* as a symbol of પારસી ધર્મ, *pārasī dharmā* “the Parsi religion” appears in the lower right-hand corner.



Figure 2: A ‘unity of faiths’ symbol on a Sathya Sai Baba building in India containing the Zoroastrian *ātašdān* (lower right corner).

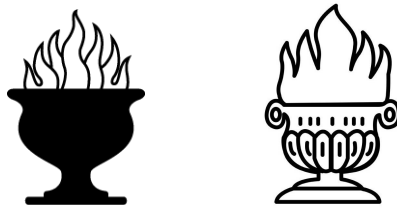


Figure 3: Grayscale and outline renderings of the *ātašdān*.



Figure 4: Colored renderings of the *ātašdān*.



Figure 5: Silver coin of Ardashir I (r. 224–242 CE) with an *ātašdān* on its verso.



Figure 6: Silver coin of Yazdegerd II (r. 438–457 CE) with an *ātašdān* and two attendants on its verso.



Figure 7: The *ātašdān* at the Zoroastrian fire temple in Yazd, Iran.



Figure 8: A Zoroastrian priest (*mobed*) carrying an *ātašdān*. The *fravahar* is engraved on a plaque on the wall.



Figure 9: The *ātašdān* symbol on a Parsi emblem with a Gujarati caption that reads કનઓશ્ર અહુરહે મઝદાઓ *kṣnaoθra* (=khshnaoθra) *ahurahe mazdāo* “prayer of gratitude to Ahura Mazda”. Instruments used for tending the fire appear to the left and right of the fire-holder. The ‘winged sun’ symbol occurs in the upper corners. Two *lamassu* pillars uphold the arch.



Figure 10: The *ātašdān* symbol shown in the center of a depiction of Zoroastrian motifs on tiles. The *fravahar* appears in the upper right and left tiles.



Figure 11: The *ātašdān* symbol and the *fravahar* on a tile façade on a Parsi fire temple.



Figure 12: The *ātašdān* and offerings for the sacred fire.



Figure 13: Drawing of an *ātašdān* and *fravahar*.



Figure 14: A relief showing two instances of the *ātašdān* on both sides of the 'winged sun' on the façade of a Parsi fire temple in Ahmedabad, India.



Figure 15: A relief showing the *ātašdān* above the 'winged sun' on the façade of a Parsi fire temple in Ahmedabad, India.



Figure 16: The *ātašdān* symbol on a gate of the Anjuman Atash Adaran Temple, Calcutta, India.



Figure 17: The *ātašdān* symbol on the façade of the Jal Phiroj Clubwala Dar-e-Meher, Royapuram, Chennai, India. The *fravahar* is exhibited below the fire-holder.



Figure 18: The *ātašdān* symbol on the façade of the Nasserwanji Hirji Karani Agiary, Cusrow Baug, Colaba, Mumbai, India. A metallic *fravahar* appears above the archway. Two *lamassu* stand at the sides of the entrance.



Figure 19: Two metallic *ātašdān* symbols on the façade of the Sorabji Thooti Agiary, Malabar Hill, Mumbai. A golden *fravahar* appears between the fire-holders.



Figure 20: The *ātašdān* symbol on the façade of the N. C. Narielvala Ajiary, Dadar, Mumbai. The *fravahar* appears to its right.



Figure 21: The *ātašdān* on the logo of the Zoroastrian Association of Western Australia.



Figure 22: The *ātašdān* on the logo of the North American Mobeds Council.



Figure 23: The *ātašdān* on the logo of the Dadar Athornan Madressa.



Figure 24: The *ātašdān* on the crest of the B. V. S. Parsi High School.



Figure 25: The *ātašdān* symbol on the logo of the Zoroastrian Co-Operative Bank, Mumbai.



Figure 26: The *ātašdān* symbol on the logo of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe.

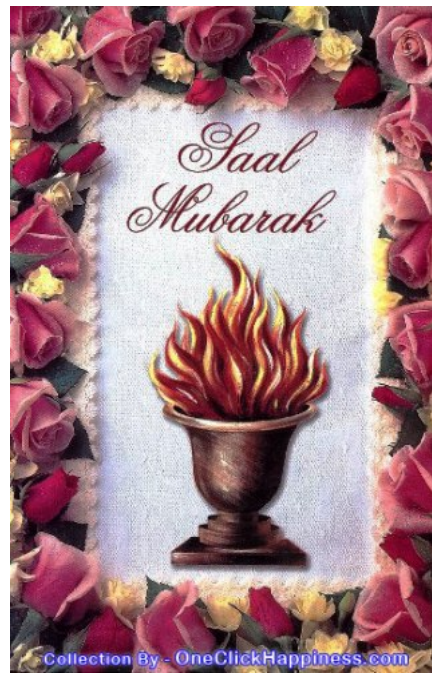


Figure 27: The *ātašdān* symbol on a greeting card for Khordad Saal.



Figure 28: The *ātašdān* symbol on a Navroz or “New Year” greeting card.

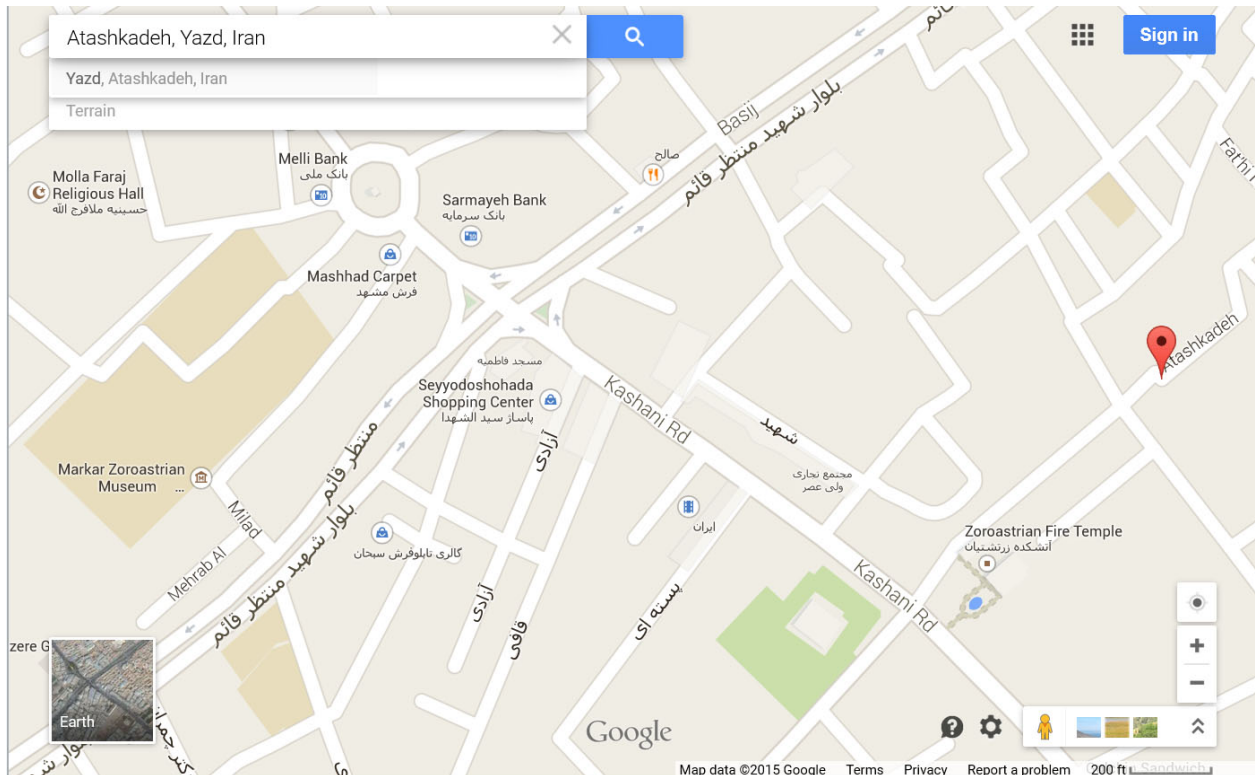


Figure 29: The location of the 'Zoroastrian Fire Temple' (آتشکده زرتشتیان) in Yazd, Iran shown in Google Maps (note: the red location marker is anchored on Atashkadeh road, not on the actual Atashkadeh, which is located a few steps south-west at the 'Zoroastrian Fire Temple'). There are specific points-of-interest markers for Islamic sites, museums, merchants, gas stations, banks, and restaurants. The site labeled 'Zoroastrian Fire Temple', however, has a generic marker. It would be appropriate to use the proposed 🕍 ATASHDAN to designate this site as a Zoroastrian place of worship.

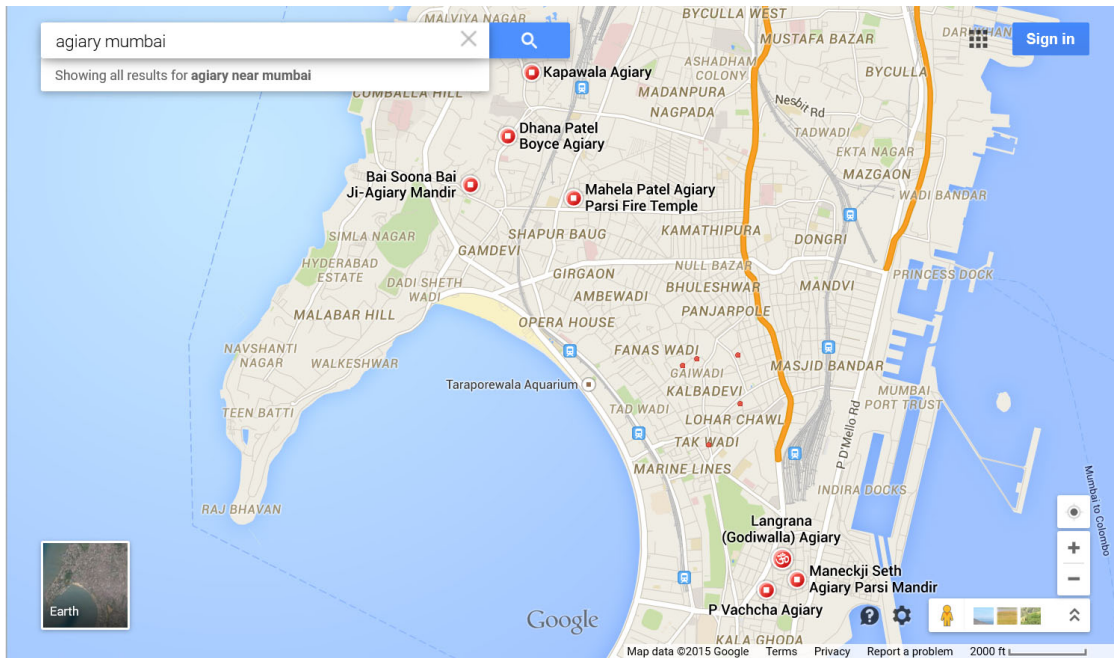


Figure 30: A map showing ‘agiaries’ or Parsi fire temples in western Mumbai. The Langrana Agiary is marked using the ॐ ‘om’ symbol, which is used for marking Hindu temples. The ॐ was likely used because a specific ‘Zoroastrian temple’ point-of-interest marker does not exist in Unicode. Other Parsi temples are marked using generic icons. It would be more appropriate to mark the Langrana Agiary, as well as others, using the proposed ATASHDAN instead of the ॐ ‘om’.

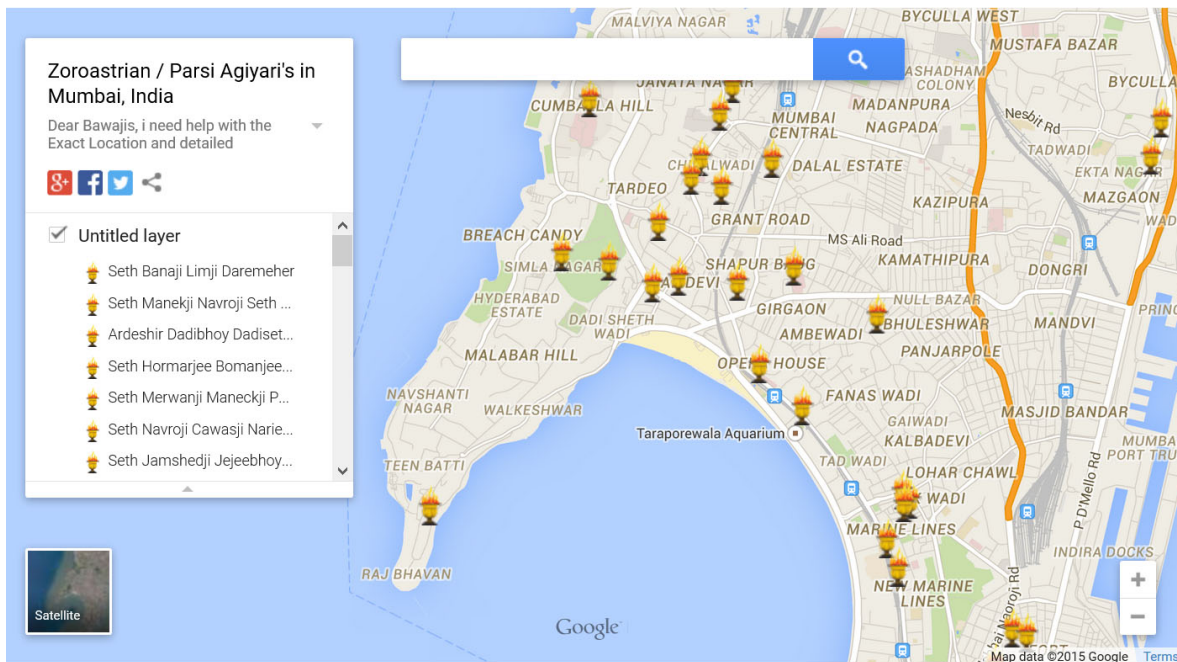


Figure 31: A user-defined layer in Google Maps showing ‘agiaries’ or Parsi fire temples in western Mumbai. The sites are marked using a colored image of the fire holder (🔥), not an actual character. The proposed ATASHDAN symbol would provide a suitable point-of-interest icon such for sites.