

# OBSERVATIONS ON THE ROCK RELIEFS AT TAQ-I BUSTAN: A LATE SASANIAN MONUMENT ALONG THE “SILK ROAD”

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The unique Sasanian rock reliefs at Taq-i Bustan are in two grottoes and an adjoining panel on the face of the cliff. The larger of the two grottoes has the richest and most complex array of images, which have long attracted attention. The reliefs were studied in detail by Japanese teams during the 1960s and 1970s of the last century. However, no real archaeological excavations have ever been carried out (Fukai et al.1984a). Unfortunately, recent restorations have completely changed the aspect of Taq-i Bustan as it appeared until few years ago: not only were a pool and a canal created directly in front of the site [Fig. 1], but also all the figurative column capitals that had

been collected there were moved to some office in Kermanshah [Fig. 2]. The dramatic decision seems to be justified by the new director of the site in order to safeguard the integrity of the reliefs, especially those in the larger grotto.

On the bank of the newly created pool on the side by the grotto, this writer noticed in June 2015 a carved block with some relief on it [Fig. 3]. My first impression was that this previously unnoticed carved stone had fallen from the external part of the large grotto where two winged victories are represented in low relief. In particular, the inferior part of the winged victory (or Nike) on the left had completely broken away. However, some other origin is possible, connected with the fact that additions have been made to the site at least since the Qajar period (1785-1925) [Fig. 4, next page]. As was suggested by Dr. Siamak Khadivi (former director at Taq-i Bustan),<sup>1</sup> the ancient pavement in front of the larger grotto that was completely removed could have presented some



Fig. 1 (left). Taq-i Bustan since the recent “renovation.” Photo courtesy of Bruno Overlaet.

Fig. 2 (below left). Carved capital formerly on display at Taq-i Bustan. Photo 2010 courtesy of Daniel C. Waugh.

Fig. 3 (below). The winged victories over the arch of the large grotto (photo courtesy of Daniel C. Waugh); inset: carved block at Taq-i Bustan (photo: Matteo Compareti).





Fig. 4. A Qajar relief added on left wall of the large grotto at Taq-i Bustan.

other interesting remains. Unfortunately they are now completely lost.

Recent publications on Taq-i Bustan point to a late Sasanian chronology for the site, although the distinguished scholar of pre-Islamic Persian art and archaeology, Pierfrancesco Callieri, has re-proposed the period of Peroz I (459-484) as the time of its creation.<sup>2</sup> The main obstacle to proposing any reliable

Photos 2010 courtesy of Daniel C. Waugh.



chronology for Taq-i Bustan is the identification of the king depicted on the back wall of the larger grotto wearing a crown that has no clear parallel in Sasanian numismatics [Figs. 5a,b,c; 6]. Attempting to identify that crown has kept scholars of Iranian studies very busy since the beginning of the last century. Before advancing my proposal for a late chronology of the site of Taq-i Bustan, I would like to focus on a specific portion of the panel of the deer hunt.

This panel is located inside the larger grotto on the right-hand side [Fig. 7]. Like the boar hunt panel on the opposite side, it is square, but unlike the boar hunt panel, it is unfinished. This is probably the main reason why it did not draw the attention of scholars who published studies on Taq-i Bustan.<sup>3</sup> The many unfinished parts include details such as the decorations on the garments that are definitely more numerous



Fig. 5a,b,c. The large grotto with details of the investiture scene and the head and crown of the central figure.





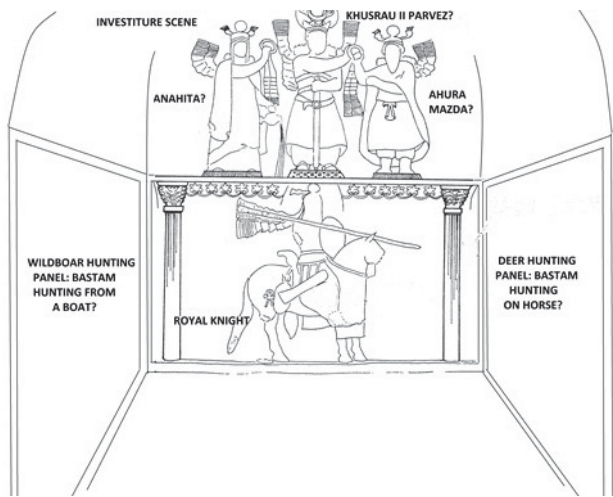


Fig. 6. Schematic drawing of the large grotto reliefs at Taq-i Bustan.

has been commonly considered a Sasanian king is the main character of every level and he is repeated three times. In the upper part, he is at rest sitting on a horse while an attendant is holding a large parasol to protect him from the sun [close-up details, Figs. 8, 9, 10 next page]. He is surrounded by several musicians who entertain him, some of them playing music from a wooden stage. This main character is larger than his attendants and musicians. He is wearing a caftan embellished with a much elaborated design but he has no crown, just a very simple headgear exactly like in the boar hunt scene. This last detail does not appear anywhere else in Sasanian art and suggests great caution in identifying that hunter as a sovereign. In any case, he is sitting on his horse while holding the hilt of his sword with his left hand and an indistinguishable object with the right. The bow positioned horizontally on his chest seems to suggest that this is a pre-hunting phase. No stirrups can be observed in the whole panel.

in the boar hunt panel. The central part is where the hunt is taking place inside an enclosure formed by a long net. Outside the enclosure, on the right, a group of attendants mounted on elephants on three levels is forcing a large number of male deer to approach the hunters. The animals enter only through one passage in the central part where standing attendants keep it open. Above and below this central passage, some other elephants are ready to push more prey into the hunting ground or just keep them under control inside specific enclosed spaces. The deer hunt scene develops on three levels as well. The person who

In the central scene of the panel [Fig. 11], the main character is hunting deer clearly depicted while coming out from the exit of the passage in a line directed in perfect order toward the far end of the enclosure.

Figure 7. Deer-hunt panel at Taq-i Bustan, with delineation of the individual scenes. Photo 2010 courtesy of Daniel C. Waugh.

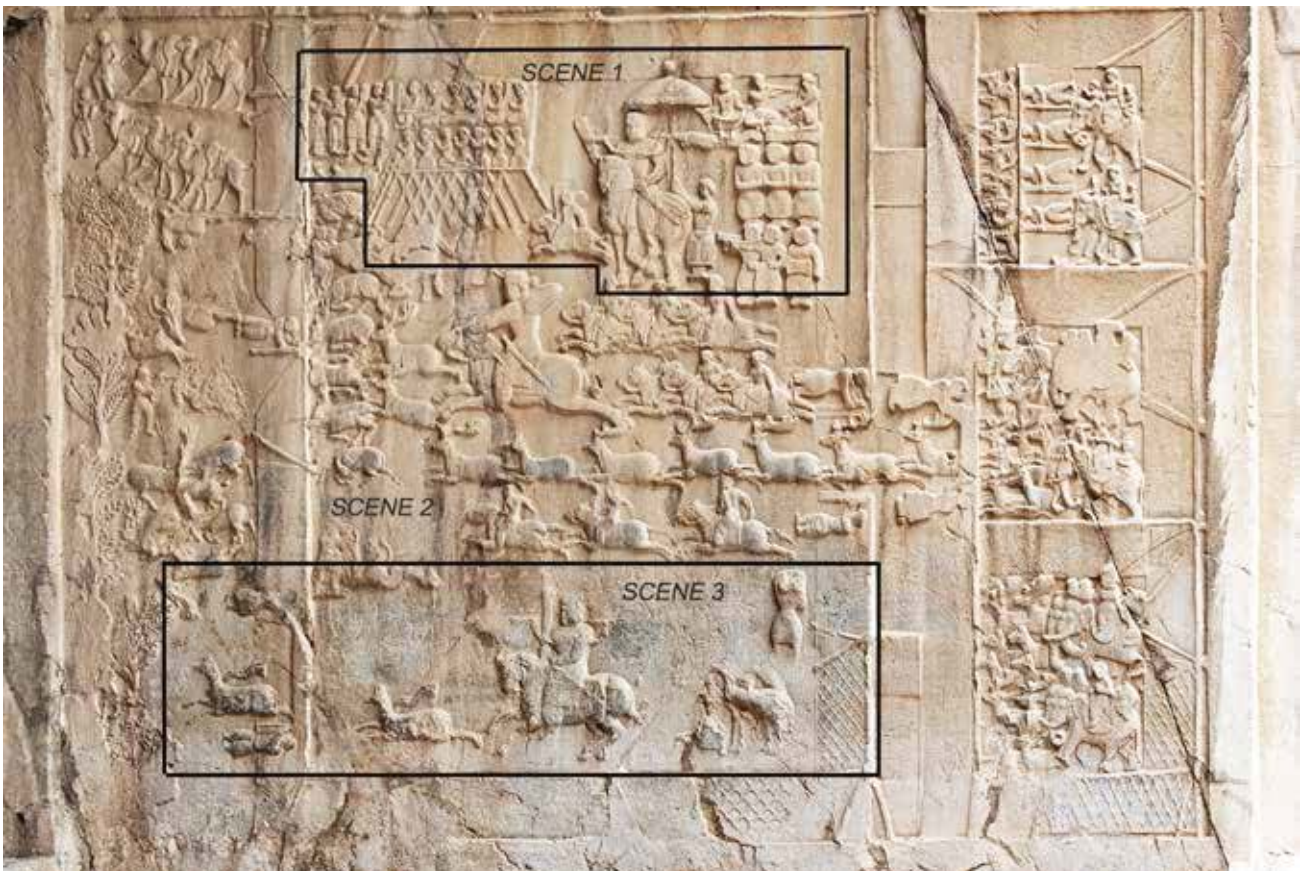






Fig. 8. The upper scene on the deer-hunt panel.

Fig. 9 (right). Detail of central figure in upper scene.

Fig. 10 (below). The upper left side of the deer-hunt panel.



Photos 2010 courtesy of Daniel C. Waugh.



Some attendants are here represented in the act of slaughtering the dead animals to be later transported outside of the enclosure through one other passage kept open by a solitary attendant. It is very clear that the enclosure is composed of a thick net even though many details are not reproduced in every part. The dead prey can be seen on the far left upper corner as carried away by camels outside of the enclosure [Fig. 10]. This part of the panel is the only one where trees and a line under the camels point at the landscape. Inside the

enclosure, there is absolutely no trace of landscape, just the animals and the people taking part in the hunt. Those people riding horses around the main character are all smaller and they do not carry any weapons.

Below the line formed by the people riding horses together with the central hunter there is a very interesting scene which is much less complicated than the upper ones and contains only a few people [Fig. 12]. One central horse rider seems to be the same as in the two other scenes described above, although some secondary details are missing such as the decorations on his garments. This is probably due to the fact that the relief was never finished. He is larger than the attendants surrounding him and he is not hunting, as is suggested by the bow positioned horizontally on his chest in a resting position. His attitude is more or less the same as in the uppermost scene, the only difference being the horse represented as moving slowly to the left. With his right hand, the main character holds an object that could be a quiver.<sup>4</sup> In the equestrian statue carved in high relief in the innermost part of the large grotto a similar quiver can be observed, but it is secured on one side of the warrior in a more obvious position

Fig. 11. The central scene on the deer-hunt panel.







Fig. 12. The lower scene on the deer-hunt panel. Photo 2010 courtesy of Daniel C. Waugh.

[Fig. 13]. According to Markus Mode (2006), this kind of quiver can be seen in the art of the steppes and in Persian art beginning from the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century CE. It is possible that the act of holding the quiver in this position in the deer hunting scene is a further allusion to the non-violent intention of the hunter. With his left hand, he holds the hilt of the sword and, at the same time, the reins of the horse. In front of the main character, a deer with no antlers is running away with a very long ribbon attached to its neck that floats in the air. Probably this is a female deer, actually the second one in the entire scene.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, everything would point to this animal as being the most important, since, in my opinion, it is repeated three times in the lower scene according to a technique called “narrative representation” that is not common in Sasanian art. On the right, two attendants wearing long caftans are restraining the female deer. Every figure has been



broken but it seems quite clear that the attendants are doing something to the animal. Probably they are fixing ribbons to her neck so as to make her recognizable. Riding in the central portion of that scene, the hunter appears very still, and there is no intention to kill the female deer as it runs toward

Fig. 13. Detail of the armored horseman in lower register of the back wall of the large grotto. Photo 2010 courtesy of Daniel C. Waugh.

another passage leading out of the enclosure. At the very far left end of the scene, the same beribboned deer goes through the passage that two more attendants are keeping open possibly just for her. Despite the simplicity of this scene, the artist felt the necessity to repeat the animal three times because it is the focus of that part of the scene.

However, some questions remain. Why is the hunter not even trying to kill that animal? Why are two attendants attaching a ribbon to her neck while a third one is possibly approaching from above carrying something on his shoulders? Clearly, there is no intention to do any harm to the female deer because two more attendants are keeping the barricade open to let her run outside the hunting ground to the left. However, it is not easy to provide any interpretation of this specific scene. In ancient Persia (both during the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods) hunting was a very important sport practiced by nobles and especially Sasanian kings. Hunting was also very good training for war. Persian kings were accustomed to hunt inside enclosed parks called *paradeisos* by Greek authors. Common people were not allowed to enter these places. It has been proposed that animals had to be embellished with ribbons, as can be observed sometimes in ancient metalwork considered to be Sasanian (Gignoux 1983; Compareti 2014). However, most likely the situation was somehow different and these ribbons had probably another meaning when attached to animals that were not to be killed. Possibly beribboned animals were a symbol of paradise, in the same way that the enclosed park itself was destined just for the pleasure of the king, or possibly beribboned animals symbolized specific deities (Compareti 2014, p. 156). However, one cannot identify beribboned animals as special ones whose death should have been avoided during a royal hunt. Were that the case, the peaceful attitude of the main character in that precise part of the hunting scene would be an allusion to his magnanimity in saving the life of a female animal that was not an interesting trophy or maybe was pregnant.



Fig. 14. Lower part of the western wall of the “Hall of the Ambassadors”, about 660 CE. Afrasyab (Samarkand). After: Arzhantseva and Inevatkina 2006, Fig. 5.

However, this would not explain the presence of another female deer just under the central hunting king.

There is no parallel in Sasanian art for the scene in the deer hunt panel, but the position of at least two attendants calls to mind something that can be observed in Sogdian art. In the mid-7<sup>th</sup>-century paintings from Afrasyab (ancient Samarkand), on the western wall of the so-called “Hall of the Ambassadors” one person is kneeling in front of a foreign envoy in a way that reminds us of the attendant kneeling in front of the female deer [Fig. 14]. That portion of the painting is very fragmentary and could be seen as parallel only thanks to the reconstruction by the Russian restorers (Arzhantseva and Inevatkina 2006, Fig. 5). Another attendant who is represented as carrying something on his shoulders at Taq-i Bustan calls to mind the position of the Chinese envoys on the western wall of the “Hall of the Ambassadors” at Afrasyab. However, at Samarkand the envoys are moving upwards, while at Taq-i Bustan that attendant seems to move toward the lower portion of the scene.

In my opinion, the attendants in that part of the deer hunt are represented in a very realistic way while all the other people and even animals seem to be stiff stereotypes deeply rooted in Sasanian art. In contrast, the kneeling person and the attendant carrying something on his shoulder do not seem to owe much to local traditions but, most likely could have been introduced from Sogdiana or, in any case, Central Asia. This too could help us better to understand the chronology of Taq-i Bustan.

In this paper, I have avoided calling the figure of the main hunter “king” or “sovereign,” a decision I shall now explain while presenting my possible reconstruction for the history of Taq-i Bustan. Some of the most recent studies on Taq-i Bustan point to a late chronology for this site. Markus Mode (2006) had proposed that the large grotto at Taq-i Bustan cannot be earlier than the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century because of the shape of the quiver that is hanging on one side of the warrior king’s statue. Mode also has some

other observations which point to a late chronology based on details of the weapons and garments depicted there. In his opinion, the equestrian statue can only be a king and not a divinity: it would have been inappropriate to have a deity under the feet of the statues in high relief in the upper level of that same part of the grotto. Mode also accepted a hypothesis by Heinz Luschey (1996, pp. 122–23), who noticed different stages in the preparation of the innermost reliefs of the larger grotto. In fact, the surface planes of the two hunting panels are different from that of the equestrian statue, which is carved much more deeply into the rock. Therefore, it is possible to hypothesize at least two construction phases at Taq-i Bustan. Initially the hunting panels were carved. It is possible that three of them were prepared: a boar hunt panel on the left, a deer hunt on the right, and another hunting panel in the center. Later, in the second phase, the central panel was destroyed and replaced with the equestrian statue, which could be executed only by carving much more deeply into the back wall. The equestrian armored warrior should be identified as a king, the same one who is depicted above between two deities who are giving him beribboned rings. In this upper image, he wears normal clothes and no armor at all [Fig. 5a]. The two deities flanking the central king have been identified as Ahura Mazda on the right and Anahita on the left. They are presenting important symbols to the king in order to legitimize him as a representative of the Sasanian royal house (Kaim 2009; Huff 2014, pp. 179–87). It is worth observing once more that ribbons of this kind would be attached only to something associated with the royal house or divinities.

Citing information recorded in the *Mojmal al-tawarikh* (12<sup>th</sup> century), Gianroberto Scarcia has proposed the most recent hypothesis regarding the king who built Taq-i Bustan – the site is very often recorded as Taq-i Bastam, that is, “arch of Bastam.”<sup>6</sup> According to that same text, with the help of “Roman and Byzantine” artists, “a general of Khusro II” built it. As a suitor, this general was also a rival of Khusro II’s and was confused with Farhad of the story *Khusro and Shirin*. In fact, Bastam was Khusro II’s maternal uncle and a military leader of Parthian origins. He rebelled against Khusro II and was able to reign as an independent ruler over a wide territory until the very beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. His figure became legendary in Islamic times and he too was confused with Farhad in the story of Khusro and Shirin. Scarcia is not the only scholar who has cited the information in the *Mojmal al-tawarikh*,



although he was probably the first openly to propose Bastam as the patron of the reliefs in the large grotto at Taq-i Bustan. The story of Bastam is supported also by numismatic evidence, because he was able to strike coins in western Iran, around the modern city of Ray which possibly was his capital (Göbl 1971, Pls. XI, XIV). However, it is worth noting that in his coins Bastam is not wearing the three-pendant necklace that one can observe in both hunting panels at Taq-i Bustan, and his crown is perfectly adapted to Sasanian taste.

The ideas of Mode and Scarcia could be combined to suggest a better historical reconstruction for every phase at Taq-i Bustan. During the first phase, a local ruler with very close relationships with Eastern Iran (Bastam?) began the construction. He ordered that he be depicted in the hunting relief panels larger in size than his attendants and wearing very elaborate decorations on his garments. He does not wear a crown but just a simple headgear in both panels, because he was not a representative of the Sasanian royal house. A foreign envoy wearing very similar headgear is represented on the western wall of the "Hall of the Ambassadors," and Mode even proposed that he could have been the same ruler represented in the boar-hunt scene at Taq-i Bustan that he identified as Yazdegard III.<sup>7</sup>

In the wild boar hunt scene [Fig. 15], the ruler is wearing a caftan embellished with a composite flying creature that in Eastern Iran represented the idea of

*farr* or *farreh* ("glory," "charisma," Pahlavi *xwarrah*). This composite creature usually has been identified as the *simurgh* (Pahlavi *senmuro*) of Iranian mythology. However, this does not seem convincing, since the *simurgh* was a giant magical bird intimately associated with the family of Rustam in Islamic Persian literature (Compareti 2006). In Sogdian paintings excavated in Panjikent (Room 41, Sector VI), there is an entire mid-8<sup>th</sup>-century painted program dedicated to Rustam's trials. Rustam is often represented according to "narrative technique" (that is to say, in sequence) with a composite creature flying in front of him (*farr*) and, possibly, the real *simurgh* on one (or, possibly, two) frame(s) (Compareti 2013, pp. 25-27; 2015, pp. 37-38; 2016).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, some countermarks on 7<sup>th</sup>-century Sogdian coins have precisely the same composite flying creature as Panjikent paintings with the inscription *farn*, that is, the Sogdian word for *farr* (Nikitin and Roth 1995). Approximately fifty years ago, the great numismatist Robert Göbl (1967, pp. 156-57) had noticed that some countermarks in the shape of the flying composite creature under consideration here appeared on 7<sup>th</sup>-century Hunnic coins together with the Pahlavi inscription *xwarrah*, "glory". Such an identification seems to be confirmed in somewhat problematic Pahlavi and Islamic literature (Cristoforetti 2013; Shenkar 2014, pp. 131-33). On some other Hunnic coins, there is evidence regarding the position of the bow on the chest of the king, as in the deer hunt panel at Taq-i Bustan. Rare inscribed gold coins of a mysterious Shri Prakashaditya studied by Pankaj Tandon show the Hunnic king on a horse in the act of killing a lion with his sword. A very interesting detail is the bow positioned on the chest not to disturb the movements of the king and, at the same time, close

Fig. 15. Wild boar hunt panel at Taq-i Bustan, with details of the ruler's robes on which are depicted the pseudo-simurgh. In the figure on the left, it occupies the large central portion of the lower part of the robe. Photos 2010 courtesy of Daniel C. Waugh.

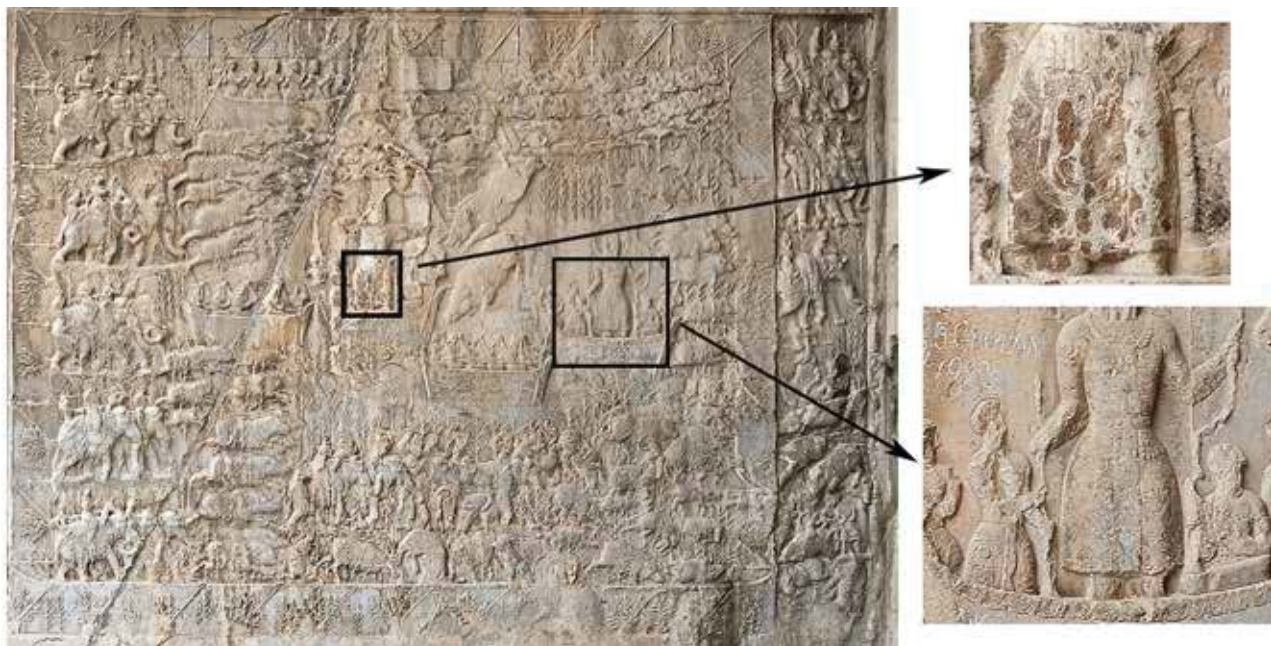




Fig. 16. Detail of the decorative roundel with a pseudo-simurgh on the lower part of the garment of the mounted warrior on the rear wall of the large grotto. Photo 2010 courtesy of Daniel C. Waugh.



enough to be used in case of necessity.<sup>9</sup> Even though the bow is positioned vertically, this is the only image that seems comparable with that on with Taq-i Bustan deer-hunt panel.<sup>10</sup>

After the initial phase of construction, a ruler who belonged to the Sasanian royal house might have decided to appropriate Taq-i Bustan and thus alter the original imagery. He is the king who appears twice on the back wall of the large grotto [Fig. 5a]. In the upper part, he receives an important emblem from the gods, while in the lower part he is depicted as an armed, victorious warrior. That same king was possibly planning to destroy all the panels embellished with hunting scenes but he could not finalize this because of some dramatic event. The unfinished parts of the hunting panels could be attributed to the arrival of this supposed legitimate Persian king, who defeated the first patron at Taq-i Bustan and stopped the construction, or to this “dramatic event” taking place at the end of the Sasanian era. In any case, the very chaotic years following Khusro II’s reign could justify the complex historical framework just laid out that is still a matter of debate among scholars and especially numismatists.

Something more should be said about the equestrian statue at Taq-i Bustan. On the garment covering the legs of the king, the same composite flying creature symbolizing *farr* appears once more [Fig. 16]. This is the first occurrence of the flying creature on a monument which can certainly considered pre-Islamic Persian. Other instances of the image on metalwork and textiles have been cautiously dated post-Sasanian or considered to be products of Central Asia (Harper 2006; Marshak 2006; Compareti 2009). In my opinion, the composite creature suggests an association of the sovereign who introduced it to Taq-i Bustan with Eastern Iran.

Some written sources from the Islamic period which refer to Sasanian Persia could be particularly

relevant here. In the beginning of 10<sup>th</sup> century, Mas’udi (1962, II, p. 282) wrote that Khusro II had nine personal seals, and one was embellished with something not better identified that he called *Khurasan khurra* “glory of Khorasan” or, according to a Latin translation proposed by E. Herzfeld, *gloria Orientis* (Herzfeld 1938, p. 157). Between the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Biruni – another Muslim erudite who was originally from Khorasan – described this *Khurasan khurra* as “flying foxes” that appeared in ancient times during the “spring festival” and represented the wellbeing of the Kayanids (Biruni 1954-1956, I, p. 260; Cristoforetti 2013, p. 341). A Sasanian seal kept in the British Museum (120341, EG 20) [Fig. 17], unfortunately unprovenanced, presents a Pahlavi inscription and a creature very similar to the one on the garment of the king at Taq-i Bustan or



Fig. 17. Inscribed Sasanian seal kept in the British Museum (120341, EG 20). After: Bivar 1969, Pl. 13, E 20.

the ambassador at Afrasyab (Bivar 1969, Pl. 13, EG 20; Compareti 2015, pp. 37-38; Compareti 2016, Fig. 3). The inscription can be read as *’pzw̄n (abzud)* “increased,” which refers to a very common formula found on Sasanian coins (and seals) from the 5<sup>th</sup> century until early Islamic times, usually rendered as *xwarrah abzud* “the glory has increased” (Daryaee 2009, pp. 24, 34; Daryaee 2013, p. 18). The flying creature on the seal in the British Museum is possibly a representation of the “glory of the Kayanids”. Bivar (who included it in the group of griffin-like creature decorations) proposed for it a 7<sup>th</sup>-century date, which is in keeping with the evidence of the Islamic written sources and the Taq-i Bustan reliefs (Bivar 1969, p. 81). In fact, even though it is not possible to prove that the British Museum seal is exactly the one described in Islamic sources as belonging to Khusro II, it could be considered an imitation of something very similar that had belonged to an important Persian nobleman or officer who lived at the end of the Sasanian period.<sup>11</sup>



All these arguments can then be situated in the context of late Sasanian history. If Taq-i Bustan rock reliefs had been executed in at least two phases, then it could be supposed that the Sasanian king who took the monument of a local ruler wanted also to appropriate a symbol of good fortune of his enemy that originally was unknown at the Sasanian court because it had come from Eastern Iran. This hypothetical reconstruction fits quite well with the story of Khusro II, who defeated Bastam and, possibly, took his monument and appropriated his symbol of good fortune as a kind of trophy. That is why the flying creature representing *farr* was unknown before Taq-i Bustan: possibly, it was imported from Eastern Iran into Persia and not vice-versa, to be reproduced soon afterwards also by Muslim and Byzantine artists. Why it was accepted and adapted in many cultural milieux and over a very long period is still a matter of debate, although its association with good fortune, glory or charisma could justify such a wide spread in cultural, geographical and chronological terms.

All this evidence additionally points to a later chronology for Taq-i Bustan since that creature symbolizing *farr* appears in Iranian arts pretty late, on the eve of the Arab invasion of Persia and Central Asia. Scenes like those reproduced on the hunting panels at Taq-i Bustan have never been found in Sasanian art, the only possible parallels being represented in metalwork. Unfortunately, very few Sasanian gilt-silver dishes have been found during archaeological excavations (Harper 2000); so every attribution should be treated with caution. The scene of the hunter who is not harming the female deer is another unique representation in pre-Islamic Persian art whose parallels should possibly be sought in Central Asia. As is well known, Bastam began his career in Khorasan and he was a Parthian (Eilers 1989). In this way, many Central Asian elements at Taq-i Bustan could be better explained as specific borrowings imported by Bastam because of his eastern Iranian background. One must also consider that some parallels of those borrowings can be seen in 7<sup>th</sup>-century Sogdian paintings. As was already observed by Johanna Movassat, the larger figure in the central scene of the deer hunt panel is shooting an arrow with his back to the viewer.<sup>12</sup> This is definitely something unusual for Sasanian art. Many other textile motifs appear on the clothes

of the musicians and attendants taking part in the two hunting scenes [Figs. 9, 18], although scholars mainly focused their observations on the central figures in the boar hunt scene (Domyo 1984; Domyo 1997). However, it could be possible that such motifs



Fig. 18. Textile details – one clearly a duck – on garment of an elephant rider, at left in boar-hunt panel. Decorative ribbons hang on the animal's cheek. Photo 2010 courtesy of Daniel C. Waugh.

were introduced from Central Asia into Persia and not, as it seems less probable, vice-versa. No other Sasanian rock reliefs display textile decorations like those at Taq-i Bustan. Apart from the *farr* symbol here to be intended as a trophy, the reliefs on the bottom of the large grotto do not display elaborated textile motifs as can be seen in the hunting panels, because, most likely, those were not Persian decorations at all but a reflection of Central Asian arts. In fact, very similar textile motifs can be observed in 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century Sogdian paintings and even in 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century Chinese paintings representing foreigners or

“western exoticism,” most likely introduced by Sogdian traders. It is very interesting to observe that both the Persians and Chinese, who knew very well typical Sogdian motifs, did not use them in official arts. For example, the very well-known pearl roundel motif appears only in Sasanian stuccoes as an architectonic element (Bromberg, 1983, pp. 251-52). It is very probable that when the Sui Emperors Wendi (581-604) and Yangdi (604-617) appointed He Chou (a Sogdian from Kushanya) for the production of a “Persian garment,” they were possibly alluding to pearl roundel decorations or something very similar (Compareti 2011). In this case, it is quite clear that Sogdian textile producers and merchants who were resident in China misled their clients presumably in order to earn more, given the fact that the “Persian style” was particularly popular at the Chinese court.

All these elements appear to foretell typical formulae found in Islamic art. Thus, Taq-i Bustan can be considered not only one of the most important pre-Islamic Persian monuments but also clear evidence of Sasanian contacts with Central Asia and a *trait d'union* between the (late) Sasanian and the (early) Islamic periods with interesting elements imported from Eastern Iran or Central Asia. These elements can be detected among not only the weapons and accessories of the garments of important people in Taq-i Bustan reliefs but also from a stylistic point of view that seems, in some cases, to be completely extraneous to Sasanian art.

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## NOTES

1. Dr. Khadivi always keeps finding new details on the reliefs that he knows very well. For example, he noticed some strange motifs on the faces of all but two of the elephants in the boar hunt panel. These motifs are shaped like a small circle with two lines attached resembling typical Sasanian floating ribbons but much more stylized [Fig. 18]. They can be observed in: Fukai and Horiuchi 1969, Pls. XXXIII–XXXIV, XXXVI, XXVIII–XLIII, LXXI–LXXII, LXXVI–LXXXVIII. These motifs are not present on the elephants in the deer hunt panel. Khadivi also studied the winged victory figures (Nike) at Taq-i Bustan and its influence on Persian art and culture up until the Qajar and Pahlavi periods (Khadivi 2009). The image of the Nike at Taq-i Bustan is definitely rooted in Graeco-Roman art but adapted to Persian taste. Typical late Sasanian motifs such as the three-pendant necklace and the small wings above the diadem on their foreheads are just the most evident adaptations (Fukai and Horiuchi 1969, Pls. XVIII–XX). For a discussion of the image of Nike at Taq-i Bustan and its Roman antecedents, see: Aoyagi 1984.

2. For an early chronology, see Russo 2004; Callieri 2014, pp. 154–59. For a late chronology, see Tanabe 2006; Mode 2006; Scarcia 2013; Compareti 2016.

3. Neither the Japanese team nor the most recent publication dedicated to Taq-i Bustan present an extensive discussion of the deer hunt panel (Fukai et al. 1984b; Movassat 2005, pp. 100–06).

4. Johanna Movassat (2005, p. 101) had already identified it as a quiver or as a barsom. The same object exists but is unfinished in both scenes of the deer-hunt panel and for that reason it looks so unclear.

5. The other deer without antlers can be observed just below the central hunting king on a horse. Both animals are as big as those with antlers, and thus are probably mature deer. For Shinji Fukai (1984b, p. 136), the animals are two dogs. However, this does not seem to be the case, because the animal is too big and has no tail. Dogs in Sasanian-like metalwork are extremely rare. One silver dish kept in the Hermitage (Inv. No. S-216) is embellished with a central king shooting rams while all around the rim there is a hunting net resembling those at Taq-i Bustan. Behind the net, there are alternatively twelve heads of attendants and twelve heads of hounds [Fig. 19, photo courtesy Daniel C. Waugh] (Harper and Meyers 1981, pp. 79–80; Pl. 27). Those dogs are



definitely not like the beribboned animal at Taq-i Bustan. According to Movassat (2005, p. 102), this animal is a decoy, which is implicitly the reason why the “king” is not going to kill it. There are no other images of decoys in Sasanian art despite the great number of metalwork items embellished with hunting scenes. However, it is not clear why a decoy should be used in a hunting ground enclosed by the net represented at Taq-i Bustan that is not large enough to justify its presence.

6. See Scarcia 2013. On the confusion in written sources between the name Bastam (in Arabic sources Bestam but Vishtam/Bishtam in Pahlavi) and bustan (garden), see Eilers 1989.

7. See Mode 1993, pp. 70–71. Another “eastern Iranian” wearing a similar headgear and clothes can be observed in a unique unprovenanced metalwork kept in the al-Sabah collection (Harper 2015, p. 341). The image of this person is even more surprising because of the object he is holding in his right hand: possibly a necklace, exactly as at Afrasyab.

8. On the occasion of the International Conference Technical Art History of Serindia: Zerafshan River-Turfan Basin Project held at the School of Art of Renmin University of China, Beijing (31 October 2016), Larisa Kulakova presented some recently restored (but still unpublished) portions of Room 41, Sector VI, from Panjikent (the so-called Blue Hall kept in the State Hermitage) where also a yellow giant bird appears next to the hero.



9. Pankaj Tandon showed that some other elements on Shri Prakashaditya coins could offer parallels with pre-Islamic Persian art, especially Sasanian metalwork. One of those coins of Shri Prakashaditya has now been published and is considered to be a specimen of Gupta golden coinage (Rezakhani 2011, Fig. 555).

10. A very interesting 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>-century tapestry kept in the Brooklyn Museum (Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 46.128a-b) presents eight people under arches. The one in the upper left corner described as "influenced by Persian fashion" is not only wearing a caftan but his left hand holds the hilt of the sword while the right hand appears to hold what seems to be a bow (Fluck 2012, Cat. No. 108). Unfortunately, in that area the tapestry is not well preserved and it is not completely clear if the bow is positioned on the chest or behind his body. It is not clear if this way of positioning the bow on the chest is a typical Iranian attitude. As kindly pointed to me by Simone Cristoforetti, in the Persian text known as

"The Book of the New Year," attributed to Omar Khayyam (2015, p. 58) there is also mention of an interesting comparison between the bow and the human chest.

11. Judith Lerner kindly informed me that more than one seal embellished with such a creature exists, although I am not aware of any catalogue or publication including all of them.

12. Movassat (2005, pp. 104-05) identified a similar posture on one Sasanian silver plate kept in Baku. In my opinion, that plate possibly reflects some problems experienced by the artist in reproducing the hunter's anatomy (Harper and Meyers 1981, pp. 48-49). A very interesting lion hunt scene with the hunter represented with his back to the viewer can be observed in an 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>-century gilt silver plate at present in the Hermitage Museum, considered by Boris Marshak (2006) to be eastern Iranian, probably from Khorasan.