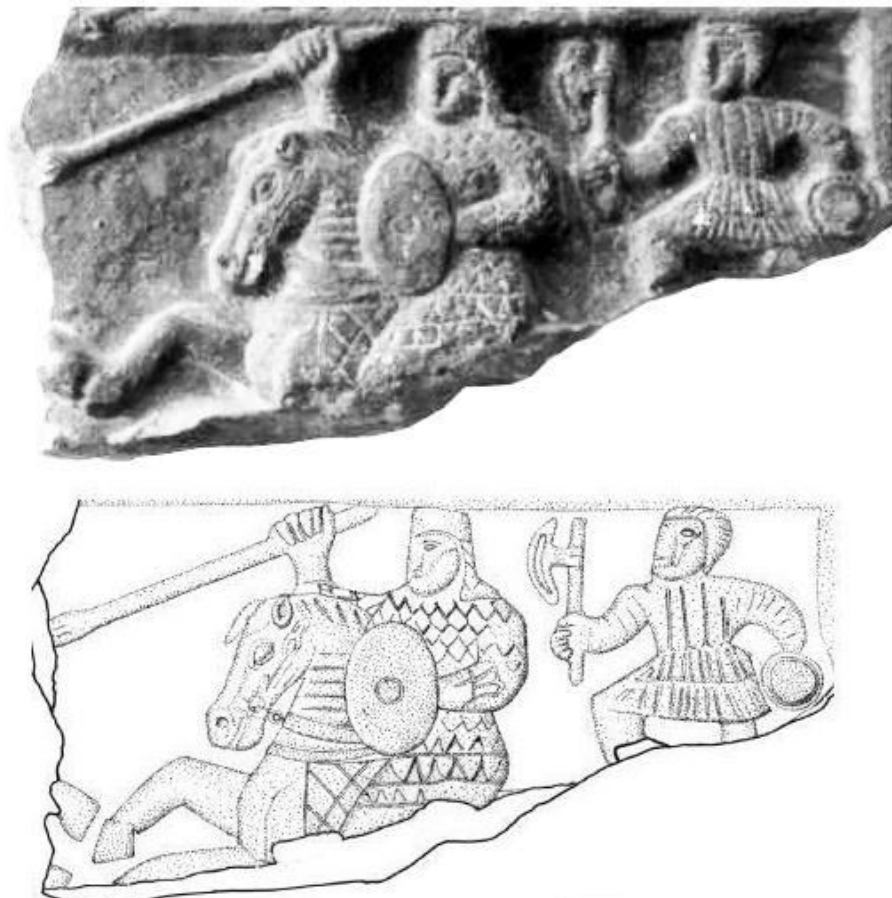


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## The Himyarite “knight” and Partho-Sasanian art

**Keywords:** Parthian, Sasanian, Yemen, Arabia, weaponry, arms and armor, stone slab, rock reliefs

The political relations between ancient Iran and Southern Arabia reached a climax with the Persian invasion and occupation of Yemen in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century AD must have resulted in the exchange in numerous areas.<sup>1</sup> Although ancient Southern Arabia had developed its own aesthetics,<sup>2</sup> its art clearly absorbed external influences, which, however, are often are difficult to allocate.



**Fig. 1.** Himyarite relief with the armored horseman and attendant from Zafar, after YULE, ROBIN 2007.

Generally, elements of Roman and Byzantine provenance blended with the ones that might have originated in Sasanian Iran, which in turn had derived from Hellenistic and Roman origins

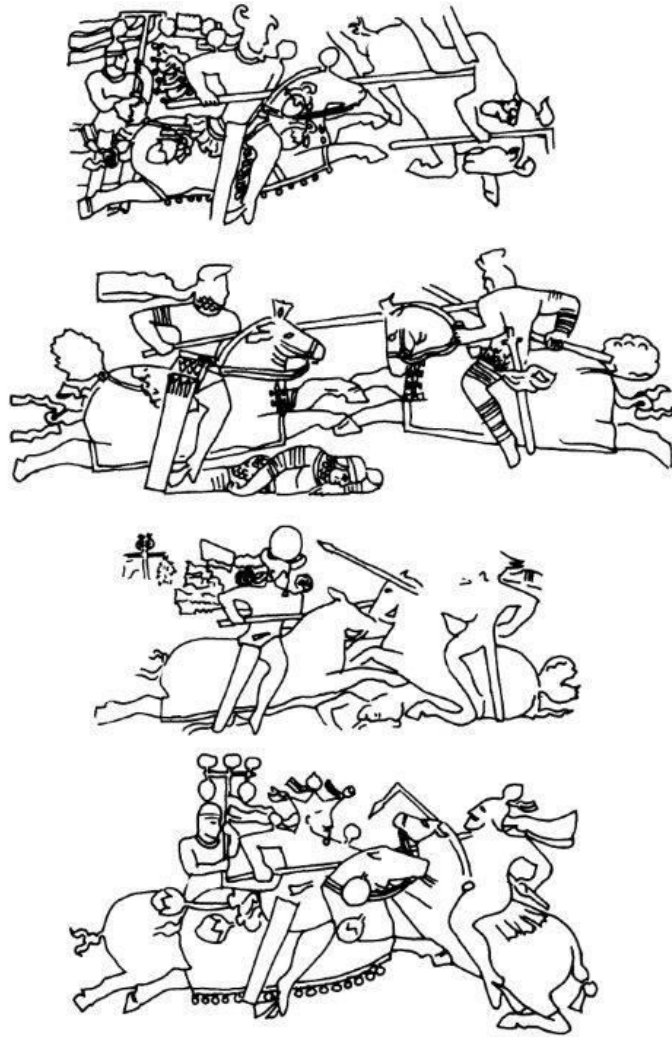
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<sup>1</sup> BOSWORTH (1983); BOSWORTH (1983b); BOWERSOCK (1983); BOWERSOCK (1982); BOWERSOCK (2012); BUKHARIN (2009); von GALL (1998b); HOYLAND (2002); POTTS (2012); ZDANOWSKI (2002); ZEEV (2007).

<sup>2</sup> SIMPSON (2002).

themselves.<sup>3</sup> The relative remoteness of the region in the middle ground between Iranian and Greco-Roman civilizations made the reception of influences weaker and blurred in their directions. Admittedly, such influences were well filtered through local pictorial tradition and the technical abilities of the artisans.



**Fig. 2.** Naqš-e Rostam “jousting” reliefs, after GALL von 1991.

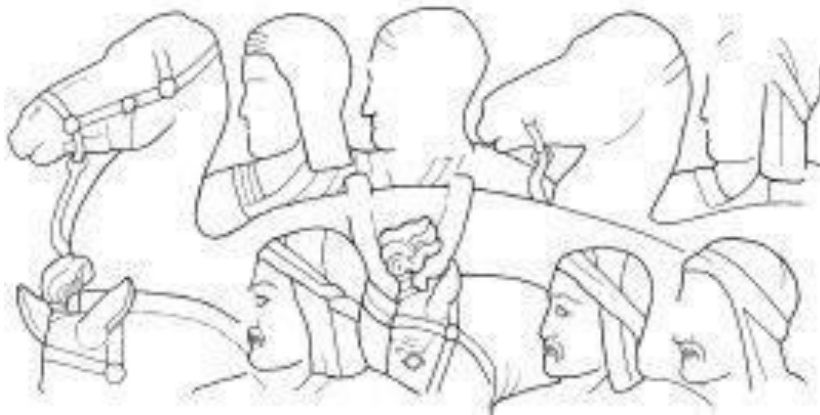
The damaged stone slab with the relief depicting an armored rider and his infantry attendant within partly preserved, inscribed frame from Zafar has been dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century (fig. 1) by Robin and Yule, based on the script of an inscription carved on the upper frame of the relief, and associated with Sasanian reliefs from Naqš-e Rostam depicting mounted combat (fig. 2).<sup>4</sup> As the left part of the slab is missing, it has been proposed that originally the relief was more or less symmetrical with the missing part, and thus reconstructed as a mirror image of the right side or as showing a fleeing warrior of the same type. A remaining obscure element from the left part of the relief was identified as a hoof

<sup>3</sup> KEALL (1995); KEALL (1998).

<sup>4</sup> YULE, ROBIN (2005-2006) 263-264; COSTA (1973).

of a horse of an opponent of the depicted warrior. Another separate stone roundel with the depiction of an infantry warrior was suggested to be part of the missing fragment.<sup>5</sup> Below, the relief will be re-examined in comparison with the Iranian iconography of the mounted combat and composition designs of Parthian and Sasanian art.

Both the rider and the attendant on the slab move to the left. The rider is shown on what is probably a rearing horse,<sup>6</sup> holding a small round shield in his left hand at chest level. On the shield are the remains of its decoration, in the form of small triangles, around the edges and there is also a circle in the center probably central boss. The rider raises his lance in his right hand to face level, its point bent downwards as if directed against a target directly on the ground. Only the front part of the lance with the fragment of the lance head appears as its upper end is obscured by the relief's frame alternatively the weapon is held just by the shaft's butt. The rider's body and arms are covered with a triangular pattern which may represent long scale armor. His headgear is shown as a single piece covering the head and falling softly on the shoulders and back. It may represent a helmet with the mail coif (the upper part of which is covered by *rinceaux*), the mail coif finding its nearest parallel in the Dura Europos synagogue wall painting of the battle of Ebenezer (NB1)<sup>7</sup> or in a cloth headdress of the type known from the depiction of a probable Himyarite embassy on Bahram II's relief at Naqš-e Rostam (fig. 3)<sup>8</sup> or, even closer in resemblance, a presentation of most likely Arab soldiers in the Šāpur II relief at Bišāpur II (fig. 4).<sup>9</sup> On the neck of the horse are several horizontal lines while its flank is covered by a diamond pattern. The neck stripes can be interpreted as the horse necklace or the laminar element of a bard or horse armor.<sup>10</sup> The net pattern on the horse's flank is most likely padded armor, possibly both protective and decorative. The horse's bridle consists of a cheek strap with a decorative element and a snaffle. A single rein is partially covered by the shield probably held in the rider's left hand. The lower and rear parts of the horse are missing from the relief.



**Fig. 3.** Fragment of Bahrām II relief in Naqš-e Rostam after von GALL 1998.

<sup>5</sup> YULE, ROBIN (2005-2006) 262-265.

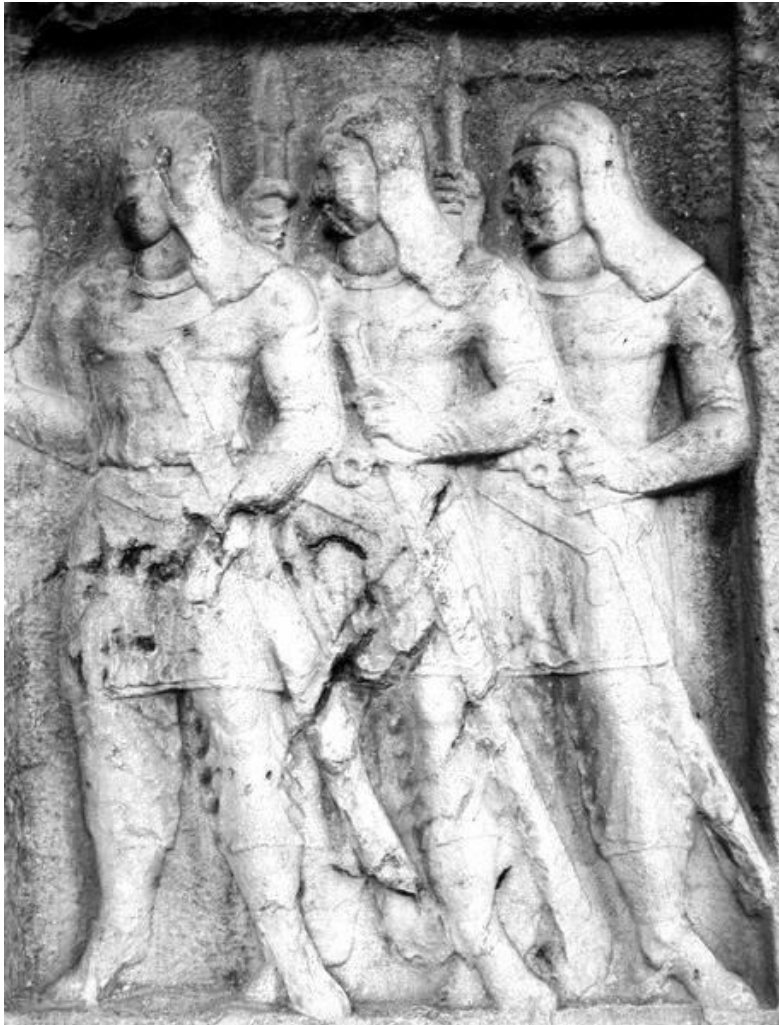
<sup>6</sup> As the back hinds are missing so we may think of a form of “flying gallop”. The latter option is less likely as horse's upper leg is shown clearly and significantly bent which is very rare in “flying gallop” stylization. JAFFE, COLOMBARDO (1983).

<sup>7</sup> von GALL (1991) 16, 50, 61 tab 17; NICOLLE (1991) 45; NICOLLE (1996) 14.

<sup>8</sup> OVERLAET (2009).

<sup>9</sup> von GALL (1998). A headgear of this type is shown on Sogdian funerary coach in China depicting a man hunting a lion from a camel back and a horseman, WYATT (ed.) (2004) 276-283.

<sup>10</sup> SKUPNIEWICZ (2014). The horse necklaces were quite popular among Roman cavalry. The race horses in Tibet and Saudi Arabia are decorated this way even currently, SIMPSON (2002) 130, fig 154.



**Fig. 4.** Fragment of Šāpur I triumphal relief, Bišāpur after von GALL 1998b.

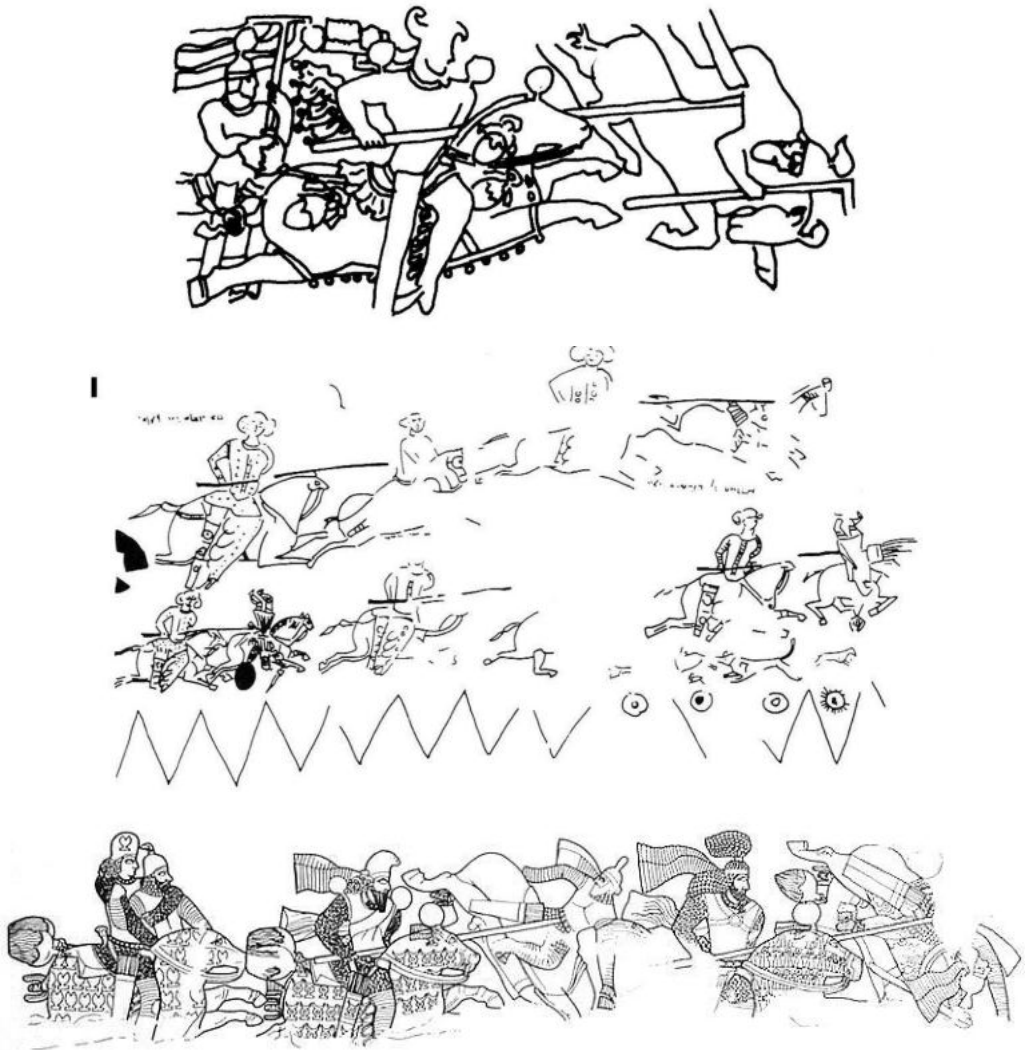
As previously noted, the infantryman, appears on the right, behind the rider and above where the horse's rump had originally been carved. This figure runs to the left holding a wide headed battle-axe vertically in his right hand and a round buckler in his left. The axe head has its shape drawn twice which suggests its center is empty creating an open-work which made the weapon lighter. His torso is marked by four vertical strips and his arms with many parallel vertical lines, thus plausibly representing soft, padded armor. His hips and thighs are covered with a skirt that is divided into two horizontal rows of tight and narrow, vertical strips, most likely a form of the Graeco-Roman *pteryges* or skirt of leather or stiff fabric. This type of lower body and upper leg protection also appears in other depictions of warriors in Himyarite Yemen.<sup>11</sup> It might be a part of costume with no protective value; however two rows shown here convincingly correspond with classical *pteryges*. This type of protective skirt is also well attested in Arabic contexts, in Syria and Western Arabia in the first centuries AD.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> KEALL (1995); KEALL (1998); NICOLLE (1991), 9-10, POTTS (1998), 188, SIMPSON (2002), 176, fig 228, 201, fig 285

<sup>12</sup> DOWNEY (1977) 53-55, 72-73; KROPP (2009); NICOLLE (1991), 17-20; WINKELMANN (2004) 312-313, 236-237, 312-313, WINKELMANN (2009).

The infantryman's head seems to be uncovered, although he may actually be wearing a soft, cloth hood or cap.



**Fig. 5.** Chasing fleeing enemy reliefs: NRm5, Tang e Arb in Fīrūzābād, Dura Europos wall painting.

As previously noted, when looking for the relief's closest analogies, Yule and Robin proposed the Naqš-e Rostam reliefs depicting the scenes of the mounted combat.<sup>13</sup> Such an association is justified because both Persian monuments and discussed relief were made in the same period according to the epigraphic dating of the relief but, to this author, does not seem correct from a formal, compositional point of view. Naturally Naqš-e Rostam NRm 5, NRm 7 and NRm 3 are the topmost representations of the so-called “jousting” scenes in Sasanian art.<sup>14</sup> One could argue that these are the

<sup>13</sup> YULE, ROBIN (2005-2006).

<sup>14</sup> BIVAR (1972); von GALL (1991) 30-35; NICOLLE (1996) 12, 16; MIELCZAREK (1993) 39-40, 66-67; SKUPNIEWICZ (2006); WILCOX (1986).



**Fig. 6.** Pantikapaion mural with mounted combat.

only representations of the motif in which the king confronts his opponent in a mounted duel. Now, it could be noted that both NRm5 and the Tang e Arb relief at Fīrūzābād depict the vanquishing an opponent attempting to flee inevitable doom, rather than the clash of armored riders (fig. 5).<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the Gotarzes Geopothros frieze at Bīstūn (1<sup>st</sup> century BC) apparently represented this particular scheme, which is also attested in the Dura Europos battle wall painting.<sup>16</sup>

NRm 7 and NRm 3 present a very different type of compositional design, originating, it seems, from the steppe Iranian, Sarmatian tradition, as evidenced by the frescoes in the Pantikapaion tombs (fig. 6) and decoration of the Kosika cup.<sup>17</sup> A rigid division of the winning left side versus the loosing right side is the most characteristic feature of this scheme (however one of Pantikapaion frescoes has the opposite layout) (fig. 6).<sup>18</sup> The winning warriors on the left side move towards the right in a stiff, static posture while their opponents either lie dead or fall to the ground, beaten by the victorious fighters.

In none of the cited rock reliefs are any foot attendants depicted; however, in one of the Pantikapaion frescoes infantry soldiers follow the armored warrior, who is armed with a lance.<sup>19</sup> Mounted standard bearers are partially obscured by the figure of the main personage in NRm 5 and NRm 3, and a similar standard bearer (or bearers) must have been included in NRm 7 (fig. 2) but either left unfinished or has eroded so that only the standard remains. It is also possible that this additional figure was deemed not fully suitable at that time while the standard seemed necessary for the precise identification of the victor.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> BIVAR (1972); von GALL (1991) 20-35; von GALL (2008); SKUPNIEWICZ forthcoming.

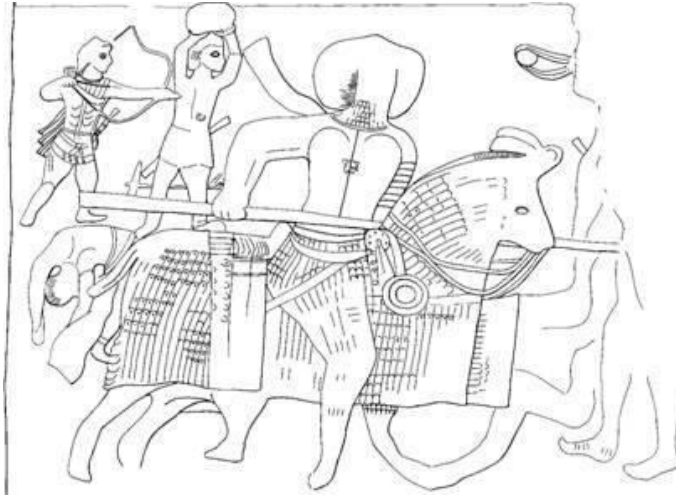
<sup>16</sup> BIVAR (1972); von GALL (1991) 11-12, 52-55; JAMES (2004); JAMES (2006); SKUPNIEWICZ forthcoming.

<sup>17</sup> BIVAR (1972); BRZEZIŃSKI, MIELCZAREK (2002); von GALL (1997); von GALL (1998); von GALL (2008); GORONČAROVSKYI (2002); GORONČAROVSKYI (2003); GORONČAROVSKYI (2006), MIELCZAREK (1999) 86-88, pl. XXII, XXIII, XXIV, XXV.

<sup>18</sup> MIELCZAREK (1999) pl. XXII.

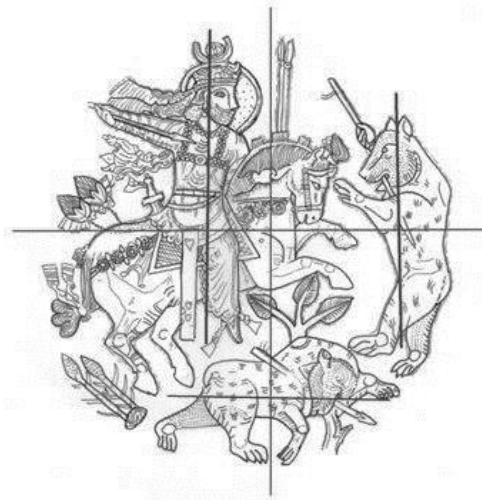
<sup>19</sup> GORONČAROVSKYI (2002); GORONČAROVSKYI (2003); GORONČAROVSKYI (2006), MIELCZAREK (1999) 88-90, pl. XXI, XXIII, XXIV.

<sup>20</sup> von GALL (1991) 30-35; MIELCZAREK (1993) 39-40, 66-67; NICOLLE (1996) 12, 16; SKUPNIEWICZ (2006); WILCOX (1986).



**Fig. 7.** Tang-e Sarvak rock relief, after GALL von 1991.

All preserved early Sasanian rock friezes representing mounted combats show the combatants wearing a cuirass (fig. 2, fig. 5b). This type of armor most likely bore an iconographic association with the symbolic display of power, rooted in the visual language of the Near East in early Roman times.<sup>21</sup> A further symbolic display of power is that all of the triumphant Iranian lancers so far mentioned firmly hold their weapons with both hands remaining full control over the shafts and consequently over entire clash. In contrast, gripping a lance with a single hand, as well as holding a broken lance,<sup>22</sup> marks a defeated personage.



**Fig. 8.** Basic layout of Sasanian iconography of fighting the beasts.

<sup>21</sup> von GALL (1991) 20-35, 56; GROTHOWSKI (2011) 142, 146, 175, 179-182, 197; KANTOROWICZ (1961); KROPP (2009); SKUPNIEWICZ (2006); SKUPNIEWICZ forthcoming.

<sup>22</sup> The broken lance or spear is a mark of defeat in Mesopotamian iconography as well as the static depiction of the victor. Symbolically, the victor with his complete lance and his adversary with his broken lance dramatically represent, respectively, order in confrontation with and defeating chaos. This however does not negate the fact that long lances break in mounted combat and are not predictive of impending defeat.



It should be therefore noted that, except for the general idea of showing an armored lancer, none of the elements of the Zafar relief matches Naqš-e Rostam “jousting” scenes. Nor do they match the Fīrūzābād Tang e Arb or Bīstūn friezes (compare fig. 1, fig. 2, fig. 5b).<sup>23</sup> There are, however, examples of Parthian and Sasanian art that contain the missing elements. Admittedly no single piece contains all of them but identifying them would allow us to track Iranian aesthetic values that might have been imitated in the Himyarite frieze.

The partially destroyed late Parthian rock relief Tang-e Sarvak III depicts an armored horseman in a cuirass, turned to the right, attacking with his lance (held with both hands) a standing figure (fig. 7).<sup>24</sup> The horse is either standing or moving slowly, perhaps rearing (clear reading of the position is blurred by the state of preservation of the object and positioning the horse’s trunk horizontally) but front hinds and its forepart is apparently covered by heavy lamellar barding. Although the right edge of the relief is missing, it is believed that only a small part was destroyed and that the rider’s enemy was the standing figure at the edge of the relief. To the left of the horseman, above the rear of his horse, are two men on foot: one an archer, the other hurling a rock; next to the latter is a battle-axe lying on the ground. It is important to note here that an infantry attendant and an axe appear in the Zafar frieze even though the latter weapon plays an active role in Zafar relief and is left idle in Tang-e Sarvak. In terms of its composition, Tang-e Sarvak III is compact; it does not extend horizontally as do the Naqš-e Rostam friezes. Compositionally, it seems to represent the principle that was fully developed in the hunting<sup>25</sup> iconography of Sasanian toreutics, in which the main personage attacks, usually to the right, a prey placed vertically on the edge of the scene (fig. 8).<sup>26</sup> Another beast is usually shown lying under the hooves of the hunter’s horse, although sometimes it is omitted.



**Fig. 9.** Parthian terracotta from Babylonia, courtesy Nadeem Ahmad.

<sup>23</sup> On the Bisutun frieze the riders are shown on rearing horses

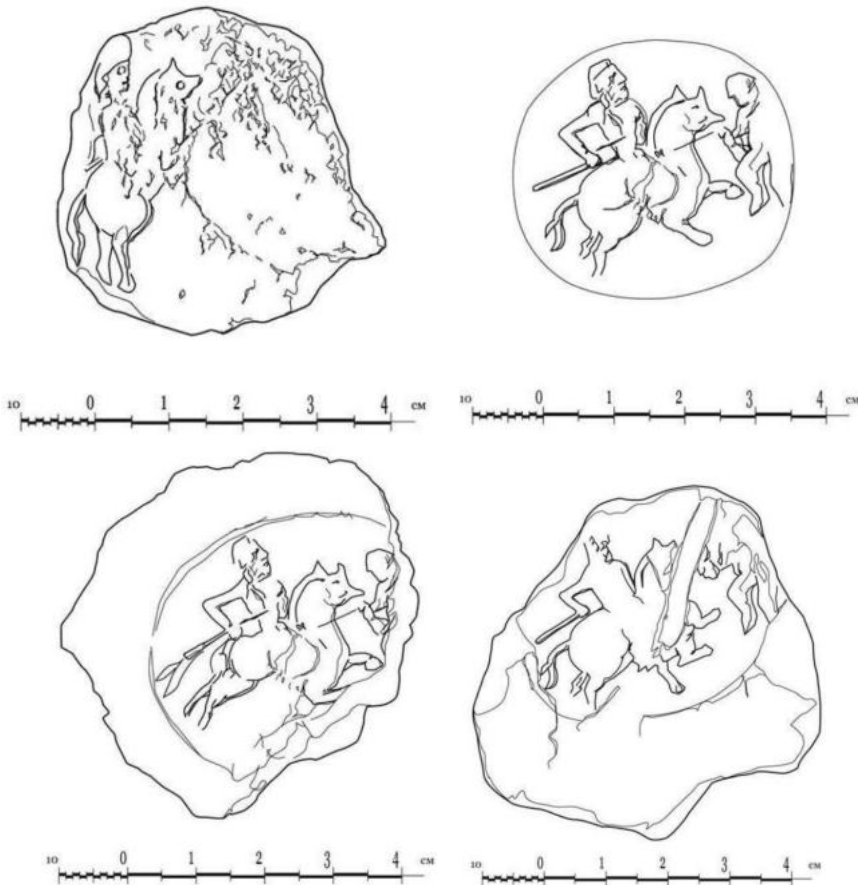
<sup>24</sup> BIVAR (1972); von GALL (1991) 13-19, MATHIESEN (1992); MIELCZAREK (1993); SKUPNIEWICZ (2006); SKUPNIEWICZ (2006b).

<sup>25</sup> Such a design was reserved for the representations of a royal personage fighting life threatening or at least large and strong beasts. That emphasized the heroic nature of the scenes.

<sup>26</sup> HARPER (1978); HARPER (1982); HARPER (1983); TREVER, LUKONIN (1987); SHEPHERD (1983); SKUPNIEWICZ (2011).



Another example of an early stage of development of this principle, also with armored rider, appears on a terracotta tile from Parthian Babylonia, now in the British Museum (Fig. 9).<sup>27</sup> The rider is shown on a rearing horse, turned to the right, clad in full-scale armor. He is shown spearing a lion that is approaching from the right with one of his paws raised. The lion is not yet shown standing upright but, to achieve the effect of pushing aside to the margin of the visual field, it is shown as an over-sized protome.<sup>28</sup> The object in front of the rider on the Himyarite slab would correspond to where the lion's paw would be if the same compositional idea was employed. The Babylonia tile recalls the group of Parthian *bullae* from Old Nisa showing a rider on a galloping rather than a rearing horse attacking a foot soldier at the margin of the scene (fig. 10).<sup>29</sup> It is difficult to say whether the attack is carried from right to left, as seen on the impressions, or *vice versa* as was on the seals. Gaibov and Košelenko have pointed out the correspondence of the scene with one of the Pantikapaion wall paintings and Iranian hunting iconography where a clearly Sasanian canon was being developed.<sup>30</sup>



**Fig. 10.** Old Nisa bullae with horseman charging a foot soldier, after GAIBOV and KOŠELENKO 2008.

<sup>27</sup> MIELCZAREK (1993); NIKONOROV (1997); SEKUNDA (1994).

<sup>28</sup> DEPEYROT (2008), analyzing the process of dehumanization of defeated enemies in Roman Imperial art, has provided examples of hunting scenes with the animals reduced to protomes, with most of the riders using the over arm technique; an exception is the so-called Vatican plate where the *kontos*-style grip is employed and the boar has only its head and front legs visible from the marsh thicket.

<sup>29</sup> GAIBOV, KOŠELENKO (2008).

<sup>30</sup> GAIBOV, KOŠELENKO (2008); SKUPNIEWICZ (2011).

On a fragment of a bronze or copper bowl from Mleiha in Oman, dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (fig. 11), appears the remains of a battle scene with an apparently armored horseman, his steed galloping to the right, his arm raised as he charges at an infantryman with his *thyreos* Hellenistic style infantry shield. Behind the horseman is an attendant on a camel. Beneath the rider's horse is the body of a defeated warrior.<sup>31</sup> It is tempting to refer this scene with the evolution of the formula showing a rider attacking his victim which itself is extended vertically and pushed to the edge of the pictorial field but (1) the composition seems horizontally extended and (2) it is only fragmentarily preserved which suggest that it might contain other parts. In Himyarite art, the formula, with the rider turned left and facing a partially depicted lion, can be found on the relief exhibited in Yemen National Museum in Sana (fig. 18).<sup>32</sup> Antonini has identified this relief as a depiction of symmetrically positioned riders,<sup>33</sup> but that seems incorrect in the light of arguments presented above as the composition which includes dominant rider and his prey pushed aside seems more plausible.



Fig. 11. Fragment of a vessel from Mleiha in Oman, After POTTS 1998.

Another analogy can be found at Ṭāq-e Bostān, in the late Sasanian sculpture of a horseman clad in mail, mounted on a barded steed, holding his lance at shoulder level (fig. 12)<sup>34</sup> and holding a round shield to protect his left shoulder. As in previous examples, the horseman is turned to the right. No opponent appears with him. Although Mode suggested that this carving might have been one of the last phases of the *aivan*'s remodeling,<sup>35</sup> it should be pointed out that there are Sasanian and post-Sasanian examples of mounted horsemen charging without a clear target depicted (fig. 13).<sup>36</sup> Therefore there is no need to speculate over the sculptor's or his patron's intentions. The entire site is well settled within Sasanian aesthetics.

The use of a shield and the raised position of the lance position relate the Ṭāq-e Bostān rider with the Himyarite slab formally, however, the chronology should be reversed as the Ṭāq-e Bostān horseman is accepted as dating to the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD therefore could not influence discussed object. Naturally there is no way that the provincial art of southern Arabia could have influenced the imperial iconography of Sasanian Iran. It is possible, however, that both had a common source.

Sasanian armored cavalry of the early period is believed to have fought with lances but without shields; however both the Parthian unarmored lancers and the Sasanian royal guard of Šāpur

<sup>31</sup> POTTS (1998) 187-190, fig. 3.

<sup>32</sup> ANTONINI (2005) 4, 13, fig.9.

<sup>33</sup> ANTONINI (2005) 4.

<sup>34</sup> von GALL (1991) 38-47; MIELCZAREK (1993) 66-68; MODE (2008); MOVASSAT (2005); SKUPNIEWICZ (2006); SKUPNIEWICZ (2006b).

<sup>35</sup> MODE (2006).

<sup>36</sup> DIAMAND (1940); SKUPNIEWICZ (2009); SKUPNIEWICZ forthcoming.

II, at least occasionally, employed shields.<sup>37</sup> Shields are commonly attested among late Sasanian cavalry; however, the *Ṭāq-e Bostān* mounted warrior remains a unique depiction of overarm single-handed lance hold of a rider while using a shield.<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that the combination of a lance and a buckler has been well attested in the art of border cities between the empires and appears in the iconography of Southern Arabia as well (fig. 14). Bucklers remained in use throughout the Near East, continuing with the Islamic conquest and down to modern times, becoming part of ritualized fencing in Syria, and remaining a folklore element in Oman.



**Fig. 12.** *Ṭāq-e Bostān* heavy armored horseman.

The small round shield might have been adopted by Sasanian warriors from their Semitic neighbors both allies and foes.<sup>39</sup> The presence of a round shield and a lance held over the shoulder at *Ṭāq-e Bostān* likely reflects an iconographic tradition about which we can only speculate, and are essentially Achaemenid and Parthian motifs in late Sasanian guise.<sup>40</sup> The nature of Sasanian art, operating within repetitive fixed motives, arouses the suspicion that the motif of the lancer with the shield might have been present earlier in visual media no longer preserved. Alternatively, this combination of weapons may have been adopted in the 6<sup>th</sup> century from outside Iran and fitted to imperial art. All in all, the form of the sculpture in *Ṭāq-e Bostān*, being definitely mature, it would be surprising if formal experiments were carried out on the most monumental, imperial expression.

<sup>37</sup> BIVAR (1972); COULSTON (1986); DIMITREV (2006); DIMITREV (2008); EADIE (1967); FARROKH (2005) 15-16; LITVINSKY (2010); MELIKAN-CHIRVANI (1992); MELIKAN-CHIRVANI (1993); MIELCZAREK (1993); PUGAČENKOVA (1966).

<sup>38</sup> Single-handed downward lance thrusts are occasionally depicted on silverware but never accompanied by shields. They either reflect Achaemenid visual tradition or result from the acceptance of Western influence. HARPER (2006); SKUPNIEWICZ (2009).

<sup>39</sup> SKUPNIEWICZ (2006b).

<sup>40</sup> HARPER (2006); HEAD (1992); SEKUNDA (1992); WÓJCIKOWSKI (2010).

It must be noted here that Late Antique icons of mounted warrior saints and their direct predecessors usually show the riders turned to the right without shields, often unarmored.<sup>41</sup> Thus, on an 8<sup>th</sup>-century Coptic icon of Saint Mercurius killing the emperor Julian Apostate can see the horseman turned right with his lance directed downwards while the upper right corner is occupied by the figure of an angel with *crux hastata*. In contrast, the Coptic 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>-century wall painting of Saint Sisinnios killing the female demon Alabasdris shows the saint on horseback, turned to the left, without armour but with an oval shield and lance pointed downward (fig. 15). Above the horse's rump a



**Fig. 13.** Armored warrior charging with no target: Dura Europos graffito.



**Fig. 14.** Examples of warriors with small round shields from Hatra and Palmyra.

<sup>41</sup> GROTHOWSKI (2011) 127-137, 143-155, 173-174, pl. 5, 7a, 8; GROCHOWIAK (1966) 49-50, pl. 83; LEWIS (1973); WALTER (1999); WALTER (2001).



**Fig. 15.** Coptic wall painting with Saint Sisinnios after LEWIS 1973.

second demon escapes along with a centaur, both of which compositionally replace the infantry attendant with an axe. Although the iconography of warrior saints developed much later than the Himyarite relief, it did so within the same or related visual culture.

These examples could prove that the Himyarite relief was not necessarily influenced by any of the Naqš-e Rostam reliefs with combat scenes.<sup>42</sup> Even considering the two different iconographical types employed on the reliefs and the state of preservation of the Himyarite carving, the Himyarite cannot relate to any of them. Visually, the relief is closer to other works, namely the plaque from Babylonia (fig. 9), and the Tang-e Sarvak (fig. 7) and Tāq-e Bostān (fig. 12) reliefs.<sup>43</sup> This, however, places the Himyarite relief in a quite different compositional layout which is closer to a square rather than a rectangle and consists of the main combatant occupying the majority of the field, usually heading right, with a vertically positioned enemy towards the far margin, and often a second enemy lying under the combatant's horse or feet. This layout was most likely popularized through silver plates where it was applied mainly to the scenes of heroic combat with the beasts. It must be highlighted here that the same design was applied on the Isola Rizza plate with a battle scene, manufactured in either a Byzantine or a Longobard workshop (fig. 16). This proves that the layout could be transmitted from hunting to equally heroic battle iconography. What needs to be emphasized is that this fixed design seems to appear *deus ex machina* in Sasanian toreutics from the very beginning. Its development, however, could not have been immediate, as stylistically the problem of vertical positioning of quadrupeds had to be solved. The Babylonian plaque may represent a stage where marginalization of

<sup>42</sup> von GALL (1991) 30-35; MIELCZAREK (1993) 39-40, 66-67; NICOLLE (1996) 12, 16; SKUPNIEWICZ (2006); WILCOX (1986).

<sup>43</sup> BIVAR (1972); von GALL (1991) 13-19, 38-47; MATHIESEN (1992); MIELCZAREK (1993); MODE (2008); MOVASSAT (2005) NIKONOROV (1997); SEKUNDA (1994); SKUPNIEWICZ (2006a); SKUPNIEWICZ (2006b); SKUPNIEWICZ forthcoming.



**Fig. 16.** Isola Rizza plate, drawn by Dariusz Wielec

the beast was attempted but depicting a lion on two legs was not yet visually acceptable.<sup>44</sup> An important element relating the Himyarite slab with the artefacts with which we have compared it is that the design is recorded on portable objects like terracotta tiles or silver plates as well as in monumental reliefs. It can be imagined that an embassy member could provide clear instructions for an artisan when obtaining the relief having the object in hand. Also, some of the silverware shows heroic hunters, in combat with beasts, on rearing horses rather than in “flying gallop” which suggests that the horse position preferred by the Sasanian rock reliefs was not copied and horse position was associated with either Parthian art or later Sasanian silverware.<sup>45</sup> Another important factor is that among variances of described model one may find personages directed left, i.e., the way the warrior on the Himyarite relief is shown.<sup>46</sup> None of the duels in Naqš-e Rostam has that reversed direction although it must be borne in mind that one of the Pantikapaion frescoes presents right to left model and the same applies to the scene on the so-called Šāpur cameo in the Louvre collection (fig. 2, fig. 6, fig. 17),<sup>47</sup> where the main personage comes from right to left, capturing his Roman adversary. Both horses are shown in the “flying gallop” and there are no lances involved; nevertheless this is probably the only almost symmetrical Sasanian combat depiction where one side is stylistically not drastically contrasted with the other. Such a design is known from Hellenistic art and has its representation in above-mentioned NB1 fresco of the Dura Europos synagogue showing the battle of Ebenezer.<sup>48</sup> It cannot, however, be considered typical for Sasanian art.

<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that the model where a lancer hits his prey with a lance held diagonally and the beast reduced to one of the lower corners has appeared in Parthian times and survived through the Sasanian period.

<sup>45</sup> Dating of the Sasanian silver is a difficult task hence a risk of anachronism will be accepted here as even late objects contain motifs developed in earlier centuries and the motifs are the core of current consideration.

<sup>46</sup> This includes not only toreutics but also the monumental rock relief in Sar Mašhad with a royal personage killing lions on foot.

<sup>47</sup> von GALL (1991).

<sup>48</sup> von GALL (1991) 16, 50, 61 tab. 17; NICOLLE (1991) 45; NICOLLE (1996) 14.



Fig. 17. “Šāpur cameo” from Louvre.



Fig. 18. Himyarite relief from Yemen National Museum in Sana, after ANTONINI 2005.



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## Summary:

The Himyarite slab from Zafar contains several distinctive features shared with some Parthian and Sasanian art pieces, but its relation with Naqš-e Rostam friezes proposed by Yule and Robin does not seem convincing.

1. It shows a rider clad in long scale armor analogically to a terracotta tile from the British Museum (fig. 9);
2. There is an infantry attendant with an axe depicted over the mount's rump similarly to the Tang-e Sarvak frieze, where there are two foot warriors and a battle axe too (fig. 7); The horse position on Tang-e Sarvak is either standing or rearing as on discussed relief.
3. Round shield and raised right hand with a lance as on Țāq-e Bostān relief (fig. 12).

4. The layout of the original piece must have therefore been squarish rather than horizontally extended, with the opponent of the main figure marginalized.

Therefore Himyarite artisans either followed unknown or not preserved Iranian iconographic pattern or combined the features of different canons. Yule and Robin have pointed out that simple snaffle was depicted in place of elaborate and decorative Sasanian bridle, an element usually pronounced in Sasanian art but not always clearly marked in Parthian iconography, especially in smaller objects. It cannot be however excluded that the slab rather follows a Roman tradition captured in local taste.

**Keywords:** Parthian, Sasanian, Yemen, Arabia, weaponry, arms and armor, stone slab, rock reliefs