

Central Asian Textile Motifs in Late Sasanian Art: On the Origin of Some Decorative Elements at Taq-i Bustan

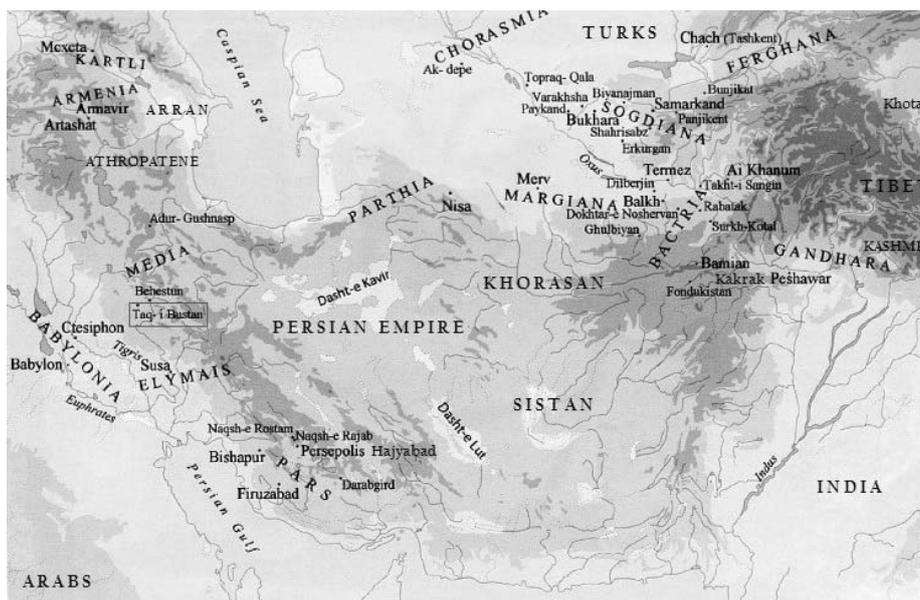
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This paper discusses textile motifs depicted in the hunting panels inside the late Sasanian larger grotto at Taq-i Bustan. Scholars of Iranian art have referred to these rock reliefs in order to trace the origin of Sasanian textile decorations and their exportation in the whole medieval Eurasian continent. This however does not seem to be the case. In fact, the textile motifs reproduced at Taq-i Bustan could be a good term of comparison only for late Sasanian textile production. Moreover, nothing like this has appeared in previous Sasanian rock reliefs. For this reason, the present paper argues that some of those motifs could actually be importations from Central Asia where reproductions of textiles embellished with those motifs were very popular. Islamic written sources on Taq-i Bustan rock reliefs could be very useful to support some ideas expressed in this paper.

Keywords: Taq-i Bustan; Sasanian textiles; Persia; Silk Road; Central Asia; Sogdian paintings

The Site of Taq-i Bustan

Located in the outskirts of Kermanshah in the homonymous Iranian province, Taq-i Bustan is probably the controversial monument par excellence of Sasanian art (see map 1). Its location is very unusual since it is among the very few Sasanian rock reliefs not concentrated in the region of Fars (Harper 1999). The most enigmatic part of Taq-i Bustan can be found inside the bigger grotto that presents two low relief lateral panels and one scene carved almost in the round in the back of the grotto (fig. 1). It is very probable that the lateral panels were executed by the same artist (or group of artists) while the reliefs in the back of the grotto are not only unusual but stylistically very different (Callieri 2014, 156-57). The rock reliefs at Taq-i Bustan were studied in detail by Japanese teams during the 1960s and 1970s. However, no real archaeological excavations have ever been carried out (Fukai, Horiuchi, Tanabe, and Domyo 1984). Unfortunately, recent restorations have completely changed the aspect of Taq-i Bustan as it appeared until just a few years ago and all the figurative column capitals and sculptures that had been collected there were moved to Kermanshah.



Map 1

Any proposal for a reliable chronology for Taq-i Bustan must take into account the king who is depicted in the innermost part of the larger grotto. In fact, he is wearing a crown that has no clear parallel in Sasanian numismatics. Despite the absence of a crown on the head of the main person in the hunting panels, all the reliefs of the bigger grotto have been usually attributed to one Sasanian sovereign (Movassat 2005; Tanabe 2006). This idea is very problematic because, as already observed above, the hunting panels on the sides are stylistically very different than the reliefs on the back of the grotto.

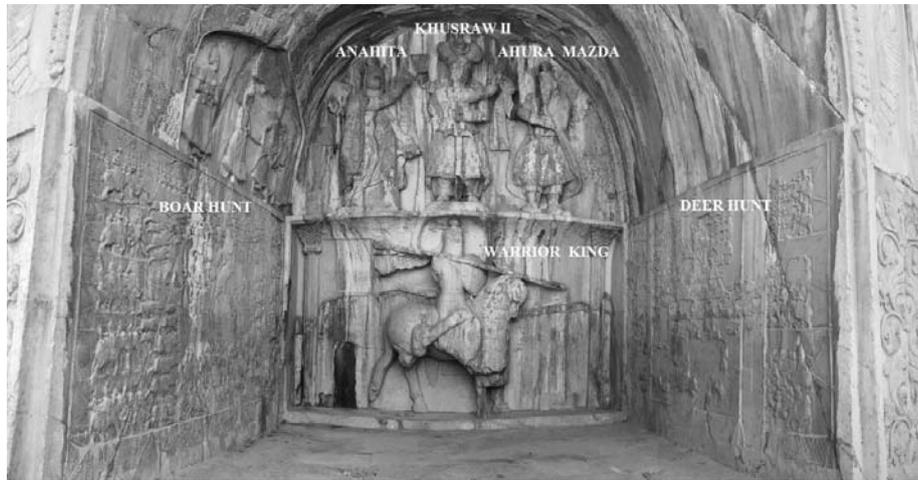


Figure 1. The bigger grotto at Taq-i Bustan, Kermanshah (Iran). After Compareti 2021, fig. 9.

Scholars of Sasanian studies proposed very different chronologies for Taq-i Bustan, although the arguments for a construction phase as late as possible sound more convincing. Markus Mode had proposed that the larger grotto at Taq-i Bustan cannot be earlier than the mid-sixth century because of the shape of the quiver that is hanging on one side of the warrior king's statue. Some other observations inevitably point to a later chronology for this site, especially because of the weapons and garments reproduced there. Mode also expressed an interesting identification for the equestrian statue that, in his opinion, can only be a king and not a divinity. In fact, it would have been extremely inopportune to have a deity under the feet of the statues in high relief in the upper level of that same part of the grotto. That scholar also observed that the equestrian statue is carved much more deeply into the rock, although the square frame around the scene remained at the same level of the lateral hunting panels (Mode 2006).

Therefore, it could be proposed that at least two construction phases can be traced at Taq-i Bustan. The hunting panels represent the first phase. It is possible that three hunting panels were prepared: a boar hunt panel on the left, a deer hunt on the right, and another hunting panel in the center. According to Mode, this could possibly be a lion hunt. Actually, the presence of the lion hunt panel at Taq-i Bustan will never be confirmed, although some similarities with Neo-Assyrian hunt reliefs constitute a very interesting parallel (Compareti 2019a, 27). Later, in a following phase, the central panel at Taq-i Bustan (the one hypothetically embellished with a lion hunt) was destroyed and substituted with the equestrian statue that could only be executed much deeper into the innermost wall.

The equestrian and armored warrior should be identified as a king who is the same represented above at the upper level between two deities in the act of giving him beribboned rings. These two deities could be 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. It is worth observing once more a substantial difference from early Sasanian rock reliefs that presented only Ahura Mazda together with the king, with the

only possible exception of Naqsh-i Rostam VIII. Not only in the back of the bigger grotto are there two deities but in the external rock relief Mithra, with a rayed nimbus, could be identified on the left and Ahura Mazda on the right of the triumphant king, possibly Shapur II (Wood 2017, 85-88).

Gianroberto Scarcia recently presented some more evidence in support of a later chronology. According to written sources and local legends studied by Scarcia, the site could be attributed to Bastam (called also Bistam, Bishtam, Vishtam, etc.), a maternal uncle of Khusraw II Parwiz (590-628) who had Parthian origins and rebelled against the Sasanians (Cristoforetti and Scarcia 2013, 344-45; Scarcia 2017). He was able to control a vast territory in western Iran and even mint coins in his name until his final defeat and death around 600 CE, most likely in a place not too far from Taq-i Bustan. Local people such as Kurds, Azeri, and Armenians (with all their linguistic variations) and ancient authors writing in Arab and Persian call that site Taq-i Bastam, “the Arch of Bastam,” or simply Bastam and not Taq-i Bustan, “the Arch of the Garden.” According to written sources of the Islamic period, some other person and not the Sasanian sovereign was considered to be in charge of the construction of (parts of) Taq-i Bustan. He was unfortunately called Farhad, which is a common literary *topos* in Persian poetry.

All these arguments proposed by Mode, Scarcia, and Callieri could suggest a different scenario for the construction of Taq-i Bustan. Bastam who had “Roman and Chinese” artists working at the site could have started the monument. However, some elements seem to be rooted in much earlier Mesopotamian civilization (Compareti 2019a, 25-32). One could assume that, in a first construction phase, Bastam promoted the representation of hunting scenes, including his own portrait as a ruler wearing garments embellished with specific symbols and without a typical Sasanian crown. Some parallels between the hunting panels at Taq-i Bustan and the almost contemporary seventh-century Sogdian paintings from Afrasyab (pre-Islamic Samarkand) would point to a very similar source that should be searched for in eastern Iran, which is Central Asia. Non-religious Sogdian paintings, such as those at Afrasyab, present a realistic touch that is completely unknown in Sasanian art whose aim was just the exaltation of the king (Compareti 2016, 76). In a second construction phase, after the rebellion of Bastam against the Sasanians and his defeat by Khusraw II Parwiz around 600 CE, the latter could have substituted the central panel (the “lion hunt” according to Mode) with his own equestrian image as a victorious warrior (Compareti 2021, 209).

Sasanian Connections with Central Asia

Bastam had Parthian origins and he maintained very close relations with eastern Iran. According to Antonio Panaino, the Arsacid Parthians wanted to be represented as archers on their coins and art in an attempt to be associated with the mythical Aresh, whose name could have been perceived as a popular etymology for Arshak/Arsaces (Panaino 2019). As an anti-Parthian counter-action, the Sasanian kings did not reproduce images of archers

on their coins. Silver vessels attributed to Sasanian Persia present, in several cases, the king hunting animals with his bow but this kind of scene is completely absent in rock reliefs, with the only exclusion of Taq-i Bustan, Rag-i Bibi (that, in any case, is an eastern Sasanian monument) and, possibly, Bishapur IV (Overlaet 2009). Such observations by Panaino could further suggest Parthian elements in the hunting panels at Taq-i Bustan that point at an initial non-Sasanian sponsor.

Bastam was also appointed governor of Khorasan (and, in another moment, Armenia or Azerbaijan) by Khusraw II Parwiz when he was still on good terms with the Sasanians (Shahbazi 1989). Details of his garments at Taq-i Bustan, such as the belt with hanging straps, and some of his weapons (such as the quiver or the bow-case that, to be precise, can be better observed in the equestrian statue) were definitely adopted from the steppes, most likely after the second half of the sixth century (Mode 2006). It should not be ruled out that textile decorative elements observed at Taq-i Bustan do not represent examples of Sasanian fashion but rather Central Asian importations as well. Prudence Harper was inclined to think in these terms, although she did not mention from where “the introduction of a new monstrous image in the late Sasanian period” arrived (Harper 2006, 22). Harper’s “monstrous image” is a composite winged creature with a dog face and peacock tail that scholars identified with the *simurgh* (Avestan *saena marega*, Middle Persian *senmurv*) of Iranian mythology. Such an identification is actually incorrect and, in fact, that creature that could be called pseudo-*simurgh* (or pseudo-*senmurv*) is the symbolic representation of *farr* (Avestan *xwārenah*, Middle Persian *xwarrah*) that is “glory” or “charisma” (Compareti 2021, 23-43).

According to the twelfth-century anonymous Persian text *Mojmal al-Tawarikh*, Farhad (who, as observed above, we should identify with Bastam) directed the works at Taq-i Bustan according to the orders of Khusraw II Parwiz. At the end of the construction phase, Khusraw had a great party at the site and donated the entire monumental area to Farhad/Bastam (Compareti 2019a, 19-21; Compareti 2021, 260). Some more arguments in support of a late chronology of the larger grotto at Taq-i Bustan could be found just among the textile motifs represented on those rock reliefs. On the garments of the colossal archer reproduced twice in the wild boar hunting scene (fig. 2) and on the fabric that covers the legs of the horse rider at the rear of the grotto itself (fig. 3), a composite creature that has always represented a big problem for scholars appears for the first time in Sasanian art. As already mentioned above, according to an old theory by K. Trever, that creature with a dog’s face, wings, and a peacock tail should be identified with the *saena marega/senmurv/simurgh* of Iranian mythology. This idea has been proven to be problematic since the real *simurgh* has always been described and represented as a colossal bird, especially in Islamic book illustrations since the Mongol period (Compareti 2021, 125-43).

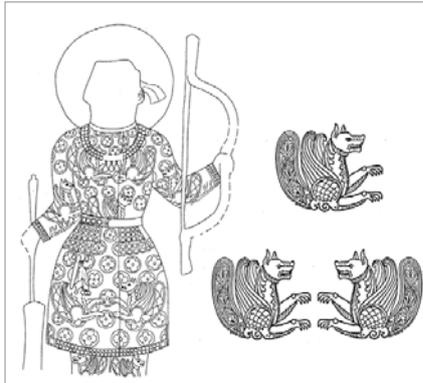


Figure 2. Detail of the decorative elements on the garment of the hunter in the wild boar hunting panel at Taq-i Bustan. After Compareti 2021, fig. 10a-b.

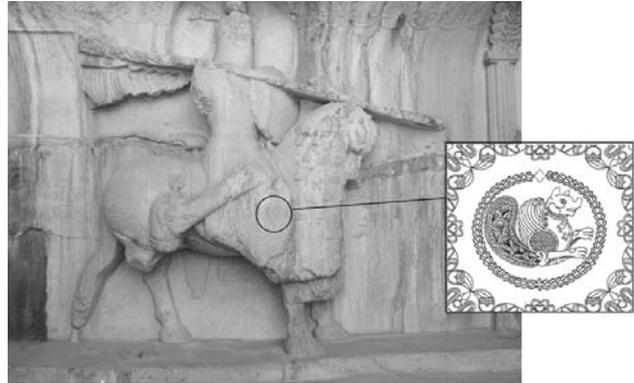


Figure 3. Detail of the decorative elements on the garment of the equestrian statue on the back of the bigger grotto at Taq-i Bustan. After Compareti 2021, fig. 11.

Parallels offered by Persian Islamic book illustrations constitute an important term of comparison with pre-Islamic Iranian mural paintings. It seems very probable that a small group of Ilkhanid and post-Ilkhanid *simurghs* could be the last representatives of more ancient local artistic traditions whose only pre-Islamic specimens survived just in Sogdian paintings at Penjikent in the painted program of the so-called Blue Hall (room 41, sector VI) depicting the trials of the great hero Rustam (fig. 4). There are unfortunately no surviving specimens of Sogdian nor Sasanian book illustrations and, therefore, the only term of comparison with those Ilkhanid and post-Ilkhanid illustrated texts can be intuitively found in pre-Islamic Central Asian murals from Penjikent, Afrasyab (Samarkand), and Varakhsha (Bukhara) (Compareti 2021, 102-12).

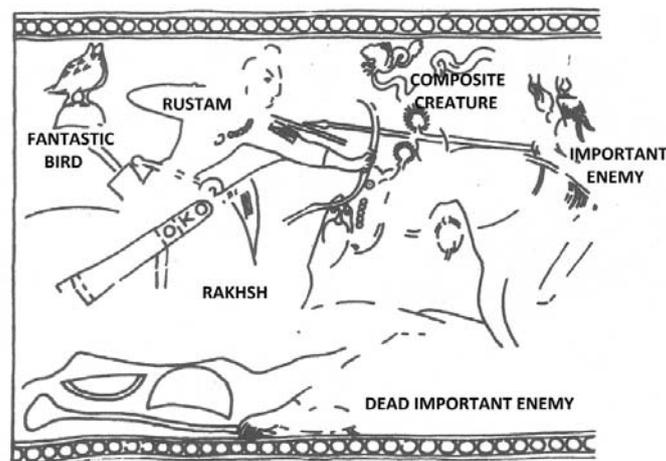


Figure 4. Sketch of one scene in the so-called Blue Hall from Penjikent, Tajikistan (room 41, sector VI). The State Hermitage Museum. After Compareti 2021, fig. 34.

Representations of a winged creature with a dog's face and peacock's tail started to appear as countermarks together with the Middle Persian inscription *GDE/GDH* (*gad*, the arameogram for *xwarrab*) *'pꝫwt* (*abꝫud*, increased) "the glory increased" on seventh-century Hunnish coins from Zabulistan and Arachosia, in south-eastern Afghanistan (fig. 5) (Nikitin 1984). Slightly later, those same epigraphic countermarks could also be found on some Sogdian coins (Nikitin and Roth 1995). In this case, the inscription should be read as *farn*, which is *xwarrab/farn* in the Sogdian language (fig. 6). A very clear parallel could be traced between the creatures in Sogdian paintings and those in Sogdian epigraphic countermarks in order to establish their identification exclusively with *farn* (Compareti 2021, 183-85). This creature on Hunnish and Sogdian coins strongly suggests some connection between that composite creature and the concept of *xwarrab/farn/farr*. At this point, one could wonder if the composite creature symbolizing *farr* itself is really a Sasanian creation and not another importation from Central Asia.

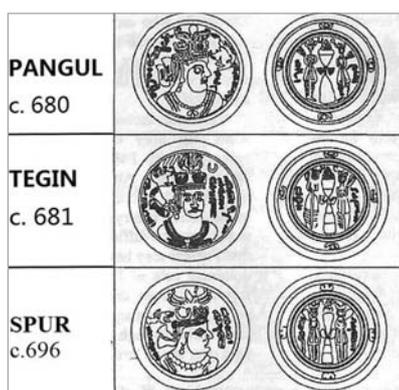


Figure 5. Sketch of seventh-century Hunnish coins from Zabulistan and Arachosia with the Middle Persian inscription *GDE/GDH* *'pꝫwt* (*gad/xwarrab abꝫud*) "the glory increased." After Compareti 2021, fig. 12a-c.



Figure 6. Seventh-century Sasanian imitation coins with the Sogdian inscription *farn* "glory." After Compareti 2021, fig. 13a-b.

The first construction phase at Taq-i Bustan should be attributed to Bastam who had strong connections with Central Asia. It should not be ruled out that he also imported some symbols to be used on his garment in the panel of the wild boar hunt to accentuate his importance. According to the *Mojmal al-Tawarikh*, Khusraw was initially on good terms with Bastam and even donated to his general and relative the entire site of Taq-i Bustan. Later the situation changed and Bastam openly rebelled against Khusraw. Having eliminated Bastam, Khusraw II could have appropriated his enemy's monument and also that composite creature as a symbol of glory to be shown on his own garments as a trophy. This reconstruction does not rule out the hypothesis that the pseudo-*simurgh* had apotropaic properties that Khusraw wanted to have actually reproduced on his royal garments. Prudence Harper has traced a very interesting parallel between the pseudo-*simurgh* and the cross among Christians, which had the power to repel demons and curses (Harper 2006, 22-23).

Central Asian Decorative Motifs Beyond Persia

As can be observed on seventh-century Hunnish and Sogdian coins, the composite winged creature with a dog's head was quite explicitly associated with the Iranian concept of glory that began to be imported from Central Asia into Persia at the end of the Sasanian period. Slightly later, that creature started to be represented also in Byzantine and Islamic art and soon spread to the Near East, the Caucasus, and western and eastern Europe at least until the beginning of the thirteenth century. There is now some archaeological evidence in support of the popularity of this composite creature, even among early Tibetans (Compareti 2020). Its exact meaning among Muslims and Christians is still a matter of debate, although it was definitely considered a very appropriate decoration for religious and secular purposes in Armenian, Georgian, and Byzantine churches (Compareti 2021, 80-93).

One of Bastam's attendants in the boar hunting panel is wearing a garment embellished with several "eared" birds with long tails standing on a pedestal decorated with successive circles. Despite the description given by Mihoko Domyo, the birds do not look like cocks nor peacocks (the latter actually appear on the garments of some other servant, see: Domyo 1984, 104, fig. 60.56, table 1; Domyo 1997, 21; Otavsky 1998, 135-37). The textile decoration of another attendant of Bastam in the same scene has been carefully re-designed. That garment was actually embellished with quatrefoil-frames containing a one-eared bird spreading its wings (fig. 7) (Domyo 1984, fig. 46a, 60.61; Otavsky 1998, 138-39). The elements on the head of the bird on the pearl pedestal are quite precisely depicted. They look like ears of a mammal and not horns nor feathers. Birds like this can be observed in the eastern Iranian (probably Bactrian) Cherdyne plate (fig. 8) and, some centuries later, in Islamic arts (Kapitaikin 2016). Also, on the clothes of one attendant riding an elephant, there are birds with ears or feathers above their heads (Herzfeld 1920, pl. LXIII). Every hint seems to point at an identification of this strange bird at Taq-i Bustan with a typology of phoenix/*simurgh* that was introduced into late Sasanian Persia from Central Asia via precious textiles trade routes, which is to say the so-

called “Silk Road.” In fact, the *simurgh* mentioned in Persian literature (above all, the *Shahnameh*) was a bird and the protector of Rustam’s family. Since Rustam was an eastern Iranian hero originally from Zabulistan (that was part of Sistan), it is obvious to think that the story of the *simurgh* in the *Shahnameh* (the so-called “Sistanic cycle”) is an eastern Iranian legend as well.



Figure 7. Detail of the garment of two attendants in the wild boar hunting scene.
After Compareti 2021, fig. 14a-b.



Figure 8. Sketch of the Cherdyné plate, the State Hermitage Museum.
After Compareti 2021 fig. 73.

In consideration of all these premises, one should admit that birds were considered very appropriate animals to express kingship, glory, and divine benevolence in pre-Islamic Persia. Some connections with a local phoenix could have existed in Parthian or Sasanian culture but very few traces can be detected in visual arts. One could even assume that if Persians really wanted to represent the local phoenix (that is the “real” *senmurv/simurgh*) they were probably inclined toward iconographical traits, which included an eared bird like the one at Taq-i Bustan.

The Middle Persian formula *xwarrah abzud* appeared not only on Khusraw II drachms but also on late seventh century Hunnish coins from the territory of modern Afghanistan. Several emissions from Arachosia and Zabulstan present the flaming deity on the reverse that first appeared on Khusraw II rare coins (Nikitin 1984). Copper coins of a Hunnish or Turkish king called Spur (late seventh century) also present his bust with a pair of pseudo-*simurgh* on the obverse and the deity with a flaming nimbus on the reverse (fig. 9). It is not possible to be sure about the identity of this god or goddess, although the flaming nimbus could be considered an allusion to the glory that is mentioned very often in the Middle Persian formula *xwarrah abzud*. The representatives of the mythical Kayanid dynasty in the *Shahnameh*, for example, were described as emanating a luminous nimbus from their bodies. The presence of the deity with a flaming nimbus on Hunnish/Turkish coins, where it appears together with the pseudo-*senmurv* in front of the king, could corroborate the idea of some connection between the pseudo-*senmurv* as an emanation of the god who was the personification of *xwarrah*.

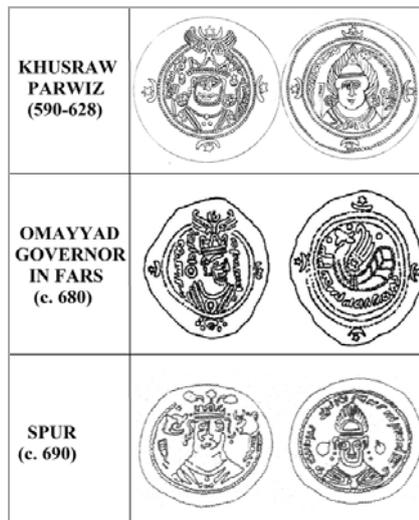


Figure 9. Late seventh-century copper coin of a Hunnish or Turkish king called Spur. After Compareti 2021, fig. 18a-c.

We could therefore assume that both symbols could be an allusion to *xwarrab*: the deity with a flaming nimbus was probably Sasanian while the pseudo-*simurgh* was Central Asian. Rika Gyselen has already cautiously proposed that the flaming nimbus, or even the same deity with that nimbus, was a symbol of *GDE* (*xwarrab*) (Gyselen 2010, 237). Persians appreciated the flaming nimbus more while the pseudo-*senmurv* became very common in eastern Iran. Such a geographical distribution probably reflects the place of origin of those motifs.

Starting from the problematic identification of K. Trever, Rika Gyselen has written in one of her studies on Arabo-Sasanian coins that “it is astonishing that no Sasanian seal seems to depict the Sēnmurw [our pseudo-*senmurv*/*simurgh*]. In the East Iranian borderlands the Sēnmurw was frequently depicted, particularly on the coins issued by the ‘Iranian Huns’. From this evidence it looks like if the Sēnmurw has a specific meaning in relation to investiture, but no such relation is explicitly stated in Sasanian Iran” (Gyselen 2000, 66). Some time later, in another paper on Sasanian monetary heritage, on copper coins of early Islamic Arachosia and Zabulistan, Gyselen again identified the pseudo-*senmurv*/*simurgh* as a “Sasanian royal symbol,” although she admitted that “the term *senmurv*, literally meaning dog-bird [*sic*], is used for convenience here; in fact, this creature more closely resembles a lion than a dog” (Gyselen 2010, 228).

The situation appears much less complicated nor astonishing at all if we admit that the pseudo-*senmurv*/*simurgh* did not belong to the Sasanian artistic repertoire but to the Central Asian one, which the Huns, Turks, and other Central Asians knew very well. When the Persians began to adopt this symbol and to represent it at Taq-i Bustan, the Arab invasion took place that would have changed the entire scenario. In the specific situation under examination, the arrival of the Arabs probably accelerated the adoption of the pseudo-*simurgh* as a much-requested auspicious symbol as it is possible to deduce by the study of most popular decorative motifs in Omayyad art. Arab artists in service of the first caliphs inherited such a symbolic composite creature from eastern Iran like everybody else in the

seventh century or slightly earlier.

Pseudo-*simurghs* were reproduced on Persian coins only in the early Omayyad period but not in front of the king. In fact, the pseudo-*simurgh* usually occupied the entire space on the reverse of copper coins. This makes the situation even more complicated since it is extremely hard to decide who invented a symbol such as the flaming nimbus and who borrowed it. In the case of the pseudo-*simurgh*, one could imagine that it was introduced into Sasanian Persia from eastern Iran where it had been quite popular, at least since the late fifth century. This is what we could deduce from the incomplete throne of the Sogdian deity in a Penjikent Temple II painting (fig. 10). According to Boris Marshak, the composite creature under the throne of that deity (the Zoroastrian rain god Tishtrya? see: Compareti 2021, 104-07) is probably the first representation of a monster looking like a winged dog, although the peacock tail is not visible (Belenitskii and Marshak 1981, 29-30). Later on, the pseudo-*simurgh* started to be used as a special symbol of *xwarrab/farn* in front of a king, as seen on seventh-century eastern Iranian Hunnish and Turkish coins or seventh-century Sogdian countermarks. In the West, it started to undergo several changes before being completely accepted in Persian art, where it never appeared in front of a king. However, its presence on the clothes of rulers at Taq-i Bustan strongly suggests some kind of connection with fortune, glory, charisma, kingship, etc.

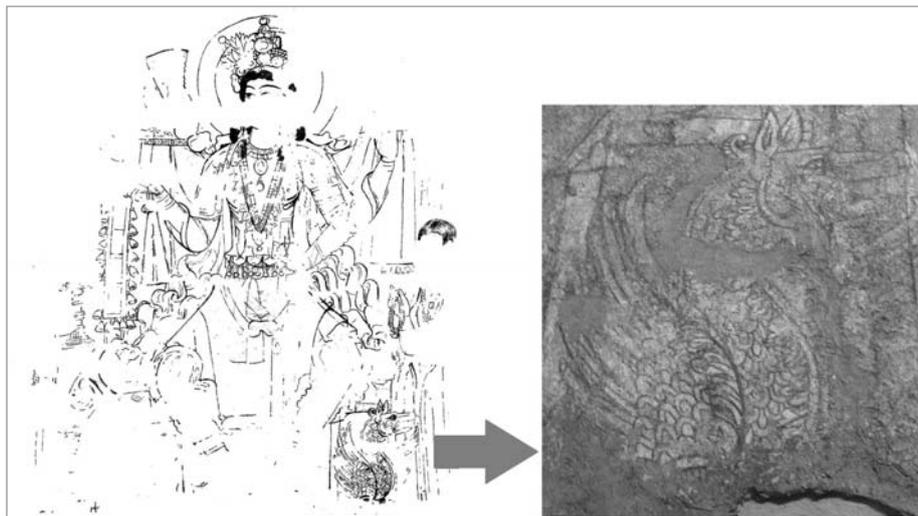


Figure 10. Sketch of a deity sitting on a throne supported by winged dogs, Penjikent Temple II, chapels 4-6, room 5. After Compareti 2021, fig. 29.

Arabo-Sasanian coins continued to present the human bust with flaming nimbus, which was based on the coins of the Khusraw II type and, for some time, this motif and the pseudo-*simurgh* appeared along with other unusual ones that scholars would have expected to find on pre-Islamic coinage (Gyselen 2009). It is not given to know the precise meaning of these motifs that do not look Islamic at all. Unfortunately, the inscriptions in Arabic or

Middle Persian on Arabo-Sasanian coins just repeat formulae without any description of the motifs accompanying them.

One unique epigraphic seal in the British Museum only presents the pseudo-*simurgh* and no other images (fig. 11). This may provide another hint towards a (late) Sasanian Persia attribution. No other Iranian art objects with a representation of a pseudo-*senmurv/simurgh* have been found during controlled excavations. The same objection could be considered valid for so-called Sasanian textiles that, in many cases and, mainly, from an iconographic point of view, have been thought to be the result of Sogdian, Byzantine, or early Islamic productions (Compareti 2009). For this reason, there is no real evidence to consider that composite creature as a genuine Sasanian creation. It could have been introduced very easily from eastern Iranian lands, possibly Khorasan-Sistan or Zabulistan, that is to say, the homeland of the Iranian hero Rustam whose family – as described in the *Shahnameh* – was protected by the *simurgh*.



Figure 11. Unexcavated epigraphic seal with the Middle Persian inscription 'pzw' "increased". After Compareti 2021, fig. 79b.

It is worth observing that Firdousi described the standard of Rustam in the *Shahnameh* as embellished with a dragon and this could have created some confusion among scholars. In fact, such a "dragon" could have been just another allusion to the pseudo-*senmurv/simurgh* that appeared as a composite creature or a kind of dragon, griffin, etc. (Compareti 2021, 186). Since the dragon of the standard of Rustam definitely had apotropaic functions, we could assume that Bastam did the same when he represented that eastern Iranian composite creature on his garment in the wild boar hunting panel at Taq-i Bustan. He probably wanted to concretely protect himself and, at the same time, associate his family with Rustam. They, in fact, shared common eastern Iranian origins.

Concluding Remarks

As already mentioned in the first part of this study, Taq-i Bustan is a controversial and problematic monument that does not present any parallel in Sasanian art. Moreover, no other

Sasanian rock relief displays such a large number of textile decorations. However, there are not enough elements to consider those textile decorations as genuine Sasanian products. In fact, they could have been introduced into Persia from Central Asia along the so-called “Silk Road.” We have to consider that Sasanian Iran was a place where there were many exchanges along the “Silk Road” and not only along the Silk Road with China and beyond but that which includes the connections with Central Asia, the West with the Byzantine Empire, the Caucasus, etc.

Textile decorations that include composite creatures such as the pseudo-*senmurv*/*simurgh* appear in Sogdian paintings and, slightly earlier, at Taq-i Bustan. There is actually one fifth-sixth century painting from Penjikent Temple II that could be considered the very first attempt to adapt this composite creature to Sogdian art. Despite its early appearance in the Penjikent paintings, it does not seem that this composite creature enjoyed great popularity among Sogdian artists either. In fact, it could have originated in those regions of eastern Iran where local mints used it quite often. These regions are Arachosia and Zabulistan, which is to say the kingdom where the great Iranian hero Rustam was born. Actually, some Sogdian paintings from Penjikent (room 41/sector VI) show Rustam fighting against demons with a winged composite creature flying in front of him (Compareti 2019b, figs. 69-72). This creature was not the *simurgh* that protected Rustam and his family but a symbolic representation of *xwarrab/farr* (Sogdian *farn*). It was similar but not identical to the composite creature on the garments of Bastam and Khusraw II at Taq-i Bustan. In any case, they probably point to the same concept, which is exaltation, glorification, and divine protection.

Every hint collected in this paper seems to point at the territory of modern Afghanistan as the most probable place of origin of this composite creature. Later on, it was probably introduced in Sasanian Persia and other parts of Central Asia where it would become very popular, especially for textile decorations.

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