

PATRYK NORBERTT SKUPNIEWICZ

SHAFTED WEAPONS OF SASANIAN HUNTING ICONOGRAPHY¹

The numerous examples of Sasanian hunt iconography are naturally dominated by depictions of archers. Despite that there are pieces showing the hunters employing different weapons - swords, lassoes or even fighting the quarries bare handed. Large and interesting part of that group is constituted by shafted weapons which for the sake of order of the current paper will be divided into: spears, which are understood as shafted thrusting weapons employed on foot of mediocre length; javelins and darts, short shafted missiles which are used for hurling and lances - long thrusting arms used on horseback.

Majority of hunt representations come from silverware, however examples of other media like stucco or seals have been gathered too.

The expression 'Sasanian iconography' will include both sub- and post-Sasanian art pieces as defined by B. Gray². As it is obviously known the art of this dynastic period had vast geographical influence, and survived the very existence of the political entity being its origin. The paper includes the objects of both cultures neighboring (or even being in remote contact like Tang China) Sasanian Iran and its descendants³. The Sasanian heritage survived Arabic conquest and except being still cultivated in Persia, the big chunks of it were adopted by the invaders and spread further across Islamic Empire. Oleg Grabar has defined the influence of the Sasanian culture in later Iran as *conservatio* until Seljuk period and *renovatio* afterwards⁴. This, however, points out that the models created or perfected in the four centuries before the rise of Islam dominated Persian imaginary up

to the modern times. In order to avoid examination of all later Persian and Islamic hunt depictions the research will be limited to the pieces either being attributed as Sasanian or showing strong and direct influence of it. The precise definition of 'central' and 'provincial' art is not really convincing especially in the light of Pourshariati's recently raised doubts towards the very nature of the royal central power in Persia of the time⁵. Great powers of Parthian families would suggest the existence of the demand for the luxury objects outside the imperial court of Ctesiphon. Complicated balance of the political powers which might have constituted Sasanian state appears consolidated with common culture including common aesthetics. Naturally the results of Pourshariati's inspiring study can not be transmitted directly into the fields of art history as it is clear that royal court remained in exclusive possession of at least some iconographic traits like coin mint and rock friezes⁶. Silverware is often being associated with so-called 'princely' courts which in fact may reflect the workshops of the great houses. Term 'provincial' does not seem appropriate if the local rulers had at their disposal powers equaling or exceeding the royal one unless the great king's authority was not supported by other agnatic clans⁷. The objects from so called 'central' workshops often can not be attributed by the crown type which deprives further of credibility the idea of royal monopoly over the silverware supply. Persian nobility was accustomed to drink only from silver vessels despising the ceramic which after Arabic conquest became a sort of division between Iranian traditionalists and new Islamic elites⁸. Abu Nuwas' poems written in early Abbasid period cited by Grabar prove widespread of silverware decorated

¹ I would like to express my gratefulness to Valery P. Nikonorov for sharing his library and permitting publishing his drawing of Saksankhur clasp.

² O. Grabar, *An Introduction to the Sasanian Silver*, [in:] O. Grabar (ed.), *Sasanian Silver. Late Antique and Early Medieval Arts of Luxury From Iran*, Michigan 1967, p. 25; B. Gray, *Post-Sasanian Metalwork*, "Bulletin of the Asia Institute", Vol. 5, 1991, pp. 59-63.

³ G. Azarpay, *Sasanian art beyond the Persian World*, E.O. Harper, *Sasanian Silver Vessels: The Formation and Study of Early Museum Collections*, [in:] *Mesopotamia and Iran in Parthian and Sasanian Periods: Rejection and Revival c. 238 BC - AD 642*, London 2000, pp. 70-75.

⁴ O. Grabar, *op.cit.*, p. 82.

⁵ P. Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire. The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*, New York 2008, pass.

⁶ G. Herrman, *The Rock Reliefs of Sasanian Iran*, [in:] *Mesopotamia and Iran in Parthian and Sasanian Periods: Rejection and Revival c. 238 BC - AD 642*, pp. 35-45.

⁷ O. Grabar, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

⁸ R.B. Bulliet, *Economy and Society in Early Islamic Iran: A Moment in World History*, [in:] V.S. Curtis, S.Stewart (ed.) *The Idea of Iran*, Vol. 4, *The Rise of Islam*, New York 2009, p. 48; H. Kennedy, *Survival of Iranianess*, [in:] V.S. Curtis, S.Stewart (ed.) *The Idea of Iran...*, p. 18.

with images of kings⁹. Problems with proper identifications of the rulers on the silver vessels seem to deny propaganda value of these objects¹⁰. There are at least several examples of Bahram Gur with Azade where royal crown does not match the ones known from coinage¹¹. The very idea of central ideological supervision over silversmith workshops should raise doubts. Naturally in the environment of Soviet 1930-1950's where Orbeli and Trever created their theory of propagandist role and strict state control of Sasanian silver, such views must have seem natural¹². If, however, the very state would not have been as centralized as depicted by Christensen than central and official influence on subjects of luxury art would not be even partially that strong. Mean-time often even the enemies of Iran were impressed by its pomp and tried to imitate its art employing the iconographical motives and imitating the style. As the iconography is the topic of this paper it is excused to include into the research the objects inspired or directly imitating Sasanian models¹³.

Spears and lances were the important weapons of both practical and symbolic significance. Classical sources are full of descriptions of Sasanian armored lancers which impressed not only historians but also inspired Roman military commanders to include heavy cavalry-to imperial army. Importance of wielding shafted weapons remained important martial skill until the very end of the dynasty what is attested by literary sources like *Xusrav ud Redag*¹⁴ and *Aydağar e Zareran*¹⁵ and by the depictions of lance using riders from the Sasanian art. In Tabari's narrative of battle of Quadissiya importance of shafted weapons for Persian horse is emphasized by statement that 'without the bow and lance the Persians are stupid like a goat'. *Shahrestaniha e Eransahr* testifies that spear (*nēzag*) tucked to the ground by the king did define the state's boundaries¹⁶. In *Arda Viraz Nama* spear was the tool of divination which allowed pointing the most virtuous of the priests¹⁷. Enchanted lance of *Aydağar e Zareran* had however being the weapon of the evil and wicked character proves importance of bow and spear confrontation in Iranian imaginary¹⁸. Ammianus Marcellinus mentioned that hurling blood stained spear or javelin was a signal to initiate attack. Expertise in both

archery and wielding shafted weapons was royal prerogative since the Achaemenid times.

Preserved Middle Persian words describing the shafted weapons are not very precise. They are often interpreted in the opposite ways. For instance Ambarcumyan finds the word *fraš* proper equivalent of 'a spear', 'a pike' or 'a lance' and *nēzag* of 'a javelin' while *arštiš* was found a general word for 'a spear' - thrusting shafted weapon. Tafazzoli translates *fraš* as the javelin, *nēzag* as 'lance', 'long spear'. It must be admitted that the latter's interpretation seems more thorough and more credible thus *nēzag* would mean lance or spear, *arštiš/aršt/aštr*, *fraš*, *šil* and *sil* - the javelin. *Arštiš/aršt/aštr* seem related to old Indian word meaning 'javelin'/'dart' - *ršti* while *šil/sil* derive from *šula* of the synonymic meaning. It is worth pointing that Slavic word *sulica* meaning hurling shafted weapon originates from the same source. Khorasani does not diversify the meanings of *aršt* and *nēzag*¹⁹. The arguments presented by Tafazzoli are definitely much stronger as *neza* is associated by Firdawsi and Bal'ami with Xusro Anusirvan's heavy riders however reading of *Xusrav ud Redag*²⁰ and *Aydağar e Zareran*²¹ points some ambiguity of the meanings as *nēzag* appears there being hurling weapon. It is however possible that Sasanian lances were not as heavy as it is sometimes believed and might be thrown in necessity despite being primarily close-combat weapon.

The images selected for current paper were grouped by depicted weapons, the situation and the way they are wielded.

I. Spears.

1. Spears in so called 'royal' or 'princely' hunt²². The proper identification of personages depicted in that type of art is not the matter of current paper. It is sufficient to state that they represent the members of the highest echelons of the Sasanian society. They wear crowns what often identifies them as kings. It should be remember however, that Persian privileged classes of the period included so called kings as one of the strata of the nobility. Also the identification of the crown might point the name of the wearer associating him with the royal name. Majority of depictions come from the silver plates and these constitute the composition schemes which seem to be followed by some seal designs. The latter will be included into the 'royal' group despite lack of crowns or other pieces of king's outfit just as the result of kindred layout.

a. Hunter shown surrounded by boars represented by their front a part, with silhouette straightened up, with spear heading right towards one of the preys is held on

⁹ O. Grabar, *op.cit.*, p.34-36

¹⁰ E. O. Harper, *Sasanian Silver Vessels: The Formation and Study of Early Museum Collections ...*, p. 47.

¹¹ P. O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity. Monuments and Artifacts of the Sasanian Near East, 3rd to 7th Century A.D.*, New York 2006, pp. 170, 182-184, fig. 89-92.

¹² E. O. Harper, *Sasanian Silver Vessels...* p. 47.

¹³ O. Grabar, *op.cit.*, p. 44-45.

¹⁴ 12 in: O.M. Chunakova, *Pehleviyskaya bozhestvennaya komediya. Kniga o pravovernom Viraze*, Moskva 2001, p. 149.

¹⁵ 75-76, 103 in: O.M. Chunakova, *op. cit.*, pp. 144, 147.

¹⁶ 9, T. Daryae (tr.) *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr A Middle Persian Text on Late Antique Geography, Epic, and History*, Costa Mesa 2002, 17-18, 35.

¹⁷ C.3(2v) in: O.M. Chunakova, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

¹⁸ 75-76, 103 in: O.M. Chunakova, *op. cit.*, pp. 144, 147.

¹⁹ M.M. Khorasani, *Arms and Armor from Iran. The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period*, Tübingen 2006, pp. 246-247.

²⁰ 12 in: O.M. Chunakova, *op.cit.*, p. 149.

²¹ 75-76, 103 in: O.M. Chunakova, *op. cit.*, p. 144, 147.

²² O. Grabar, *op.cit.*, p. 46.



Fig. 1. Plate from the tomb of Feng Hetu.



Fig. 3. Yazdagird killing a stag from the Metropolitan Museum of Arts collection.

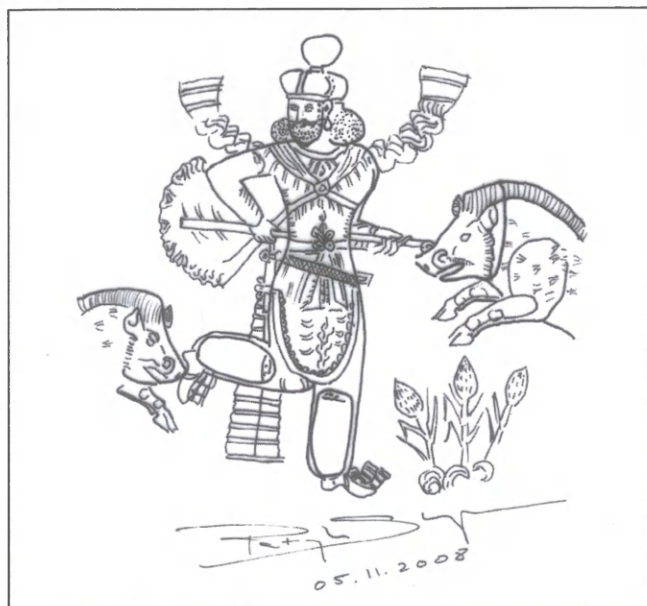


Fig. 2. Plate from Shelby and White collection.



Fig. 4. Shapur II fighting bears from Shogakukan collection.

the hips level. Hunter's head is turned left. His right leg is bent and seemingly pushes away one quarry. This type is represented by the famous plate excavated in the tomb of Feng Hetu - the Northern Wei official in China (Fig. 1) and the plate from the Shelby and White Collection (Fig. 2)²³. In the former one personage is depicted

in full left profile with three beasts while in the latter one, the head is shown in three quarters and in much deeper relief but only two boars are visible. The pieces vary in style and execution what definitely means different time of manufacture and workshop. This compositional motive may reflect the lost narrative or common *topos*²⁴.

²³ P. O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, pp. 123-125, 148, pl. 68-69; eadem, *An Iranian Silver Vessel from the Tomb of Feng Hetu*, "Bulletin of the Asia Institute", Vol. 4, 1990, pp. 51-61; K. Tanabe, *A Kushano-Sasanian Silver Plate and Central Asian Tigers*, "Silk Road Art and Archaeology", vol. VII, 2001, pp. 178-180; P. O. Harper, *Image and Identity: Art of the Early Sasanian Dynasty*, [in:] V. S. Curtis, S. Stewart, *The Idea of Iran*, Vol. 3,

The Sasanian Era, London-New York 2008, p. 81; B. I. Marshak, *Central Asian Metalwork in China*, [in:] J.C.Y. Waytt (ed.) *China. Dawn of a Golden Age, 200-750 AD*, New York 2005, p. 51; P. O. Harper, *Plate with hunting scene*, [in:] J.C.Y. Waytt (ed.) *op. cit.*, p.152-153.

²⁴ P. O. Harper, P. Meyers, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period*, Vol. I: *Royal Imagery*, New York, 1981, pp. 63-64, 217, Pl. 26; P. O. Harper, *Sasanian Silver Vessels: Recent Developments*,

b. Hunter depicted slightly bent to the right as if pressing with the shaft held on the hips level with the prey shown vertically on the right. This pattern is represented by the plate depicting Yazdegird I slaying the stag from Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 3)²⁵ and Shapur II killing bears from Shogakukan collection (Fig. 4)²⁶, both kings can be identified by the crowns they wear. The important difference between these two pieces is dead quarry under the Shapur's feet lacking on the Yazdagird's plate which however relates the former with mounted beast combat. Further difference is Yazdagird's weapon which might not be a spear but sort of double-pointed arm with crescent-shaped head. Similar head can be observed on another Yazdagird's depiction presented below. The existence of battle forks in later Iran is well attested however the closer association would be tridents known from Kushano-Sasanian coins sometimes depicted with pronounced external arms²⁷. Another unique feature of the weapon is the fist-shaped butt which might relate to Achaemenid ball or apple-butted spears known from iconography. It is probable that the weapon has purely symbolic meaning and does not reflect the hunting practice.

c. The unique depiction on the plate from Seattle Museum of Art collection (Fig. 5) show the personage who can not be identified by the crown shape, killing the lion on his right with spear held on the shoulder level²⁸. One dead lion lies under man's feet. Pronounced triangular spear head and ribbon tied to the shaft are distinctive features of this arm in comparison with other known Sasanian arms²⁹. It might resulted from copying seal impressions where the large weapon heads effected from crudeness of the execution alternatively it reflects hunting spear design which prevented the arm from transfixing the animal's body on one hand and inflicting large wounds on the other.

d. The last subdivision within the 'royal hunt' depictions of hunting on foot employing spears are seal designs which vary strongly in execution and might even follow different traditions despite superficial similarity to the ones shown in the toreutics. Five sygillographic examples of the personages fighting on foot with animals which follow the layout of the 'royal hunt' are: two seals from collection from Leyden and Berkeley. Both of Leyden seals show the hunter killing bear in the type very similar to royal representations - one with spear at hips level and prey on the right and the

other to the left (Fig. 6)³⁰. Stars and crescent in the composition reveal its symbolic, most likely astronomical or astrological meaning. The scenes on Sasanian silver are sometimes explained in terms of celestial drama³¹. The personage's headgear does not follow any royal patterns known from coinage. The other Leyden seal depicts the personage with the lengthy spear held on the hips level killing a monster on the left³². Size and crudeness of the composition do not allow to judge whether shown weapon is intentional picture of a pike or the proportion comes from the format limitation. The Berkeley seals seem to follow the old Achaemenid traditions³³ though position of the personages and beasts is similar to royal foot hunting scenes.

2. Spears in 'non-royal' hunt depictions. That type of iconographic evidence comes from more diverse sources including various types of silver vessels (the motif of the 'royal hunt' in toreutics was reserved for the plates) and stucco friezes.

a. The iconography of the dressed personages in combat with the animals can be classified as 'realistic'. Three examples of that type were gathered for the current paper: the silver plate from Hermitage found in Nizhne Shakhrovka (Fig. 7)³⁴, the plate from the same museum (Fig. 8-9) and the vase from Teheran (Fig. 10)³⁵. On all pieces the spear wielding hunters keep their weapons on the hips level and are directing to the right. All stand with the feet spread out what marks power and direction of the thrust. In both Nizhne Shakhrovka³⁶ and Teheran vase the spears themselves are not shown and the quarries are separated with floral ornament. Nizhne Shakhrova plate represents armed men

³⁰ R. Gyselen, *L'Art Sigillaire Sassanide dans les Collections de Leyde*, Leiden 1997, pp. 1-11.

³¹ B. I. Marshak, *The Decoration of some Late Sasanian Silver Vessels and its Subject-Matter*, [in:] V. S. Curtis, R. Hillenbrand, J. M. Rogers (ed.), *The Art and Archaeology of Ancient Persia...*, pp. 86-87; P. O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, p. 91-92.

³² R. Gyselen, *op.cit.*, p. 6, pl. I.

³³ Survival of the old iconographic or even aesthetic traditions in the Sasanian art was emphasized recently by P. O. Harper, *In Search of Cultural Identity...*, pass.

³⁴ K.V. Trever, V. G. Lukonin, *Sasanidskoe serebro. Sobranyie Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha. Khudozhestvennaya kultura Irana III-VIII vekov*, Moskva 1987, pp. 49, 107, 115 fig. 1-5, 75-76 - Trever and Lukonin identified the personages on Nizhne Shakhrovka plate as gladiators being an effect of the Western influence. There is however no track of fight between them while they are confronted with animal protomes in the medallions which seem to fit better the pictorial logic of the Sasanian art; P. O. Harper, P. Meyers, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period*, Vol. I: *Royal Imagery*, New York, 1981, pp. 31-33, fig. 8.

³⁵ P. O. Harper, *The Royal Hunter. Art of the Sasanian Empire*, New York 1978, pp. 65-67, fig. 22; M. Rosen-Ayalon, *A Non-Royal Hunter Vessel*, "Bulletin of the Asia Institute", Vol. 5, 1991, pp. 66-67, Fig. 3.

³⁶ P. O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, pp. 134-135, 154, fig. 79.

[in:] V. S. Curtis, R. Hillenbrand, J. M. Rogers (ed.), *The Art and Archaeology of Ancient Persia. New Light on the Parthian and Sasanian Empires*, London, New York, 1998, pp. 69-70.

²⁵ O. Grabar, *op.cit.*, pp. 77, 98, plate 10.

²⁶ K. Tanabe, *op.cit.*, pp. 181-182, plate II.

²⁷ E. Herzfeld, *Kushano-Sasnaian Coins*, New Delhi 1930, pp. 42-45, pl. I-IV.

²⁸ O. Grabar, *op.cit.*, pp. 49-51, 77, 97, plate 9; p. 37, pl. XII.

²⁹ The ribbon affixed to the spear of clear scepter function appears on Kushano-Sasanian painting from Ghulbiyan, P.O. Harper, *op.cit.*, pp. 122-123, 147, fig. 67.

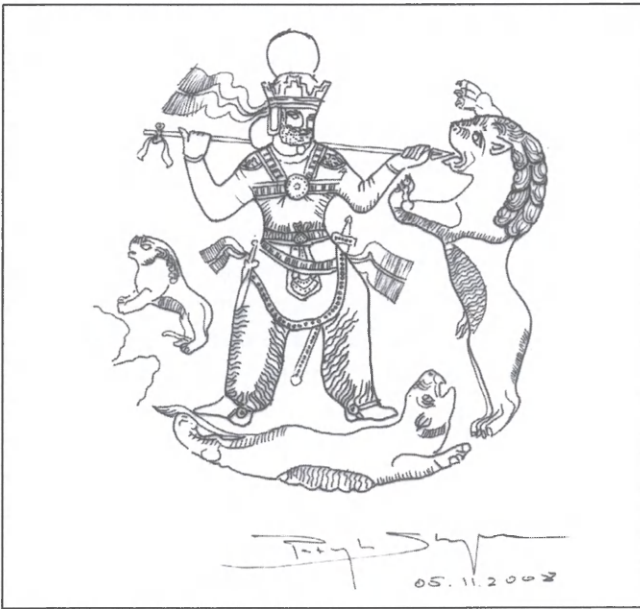


Fig. 5. Plate from Seattle Museum of Arts collection.



Fig. 6. Seal impression from the Leyden collection.

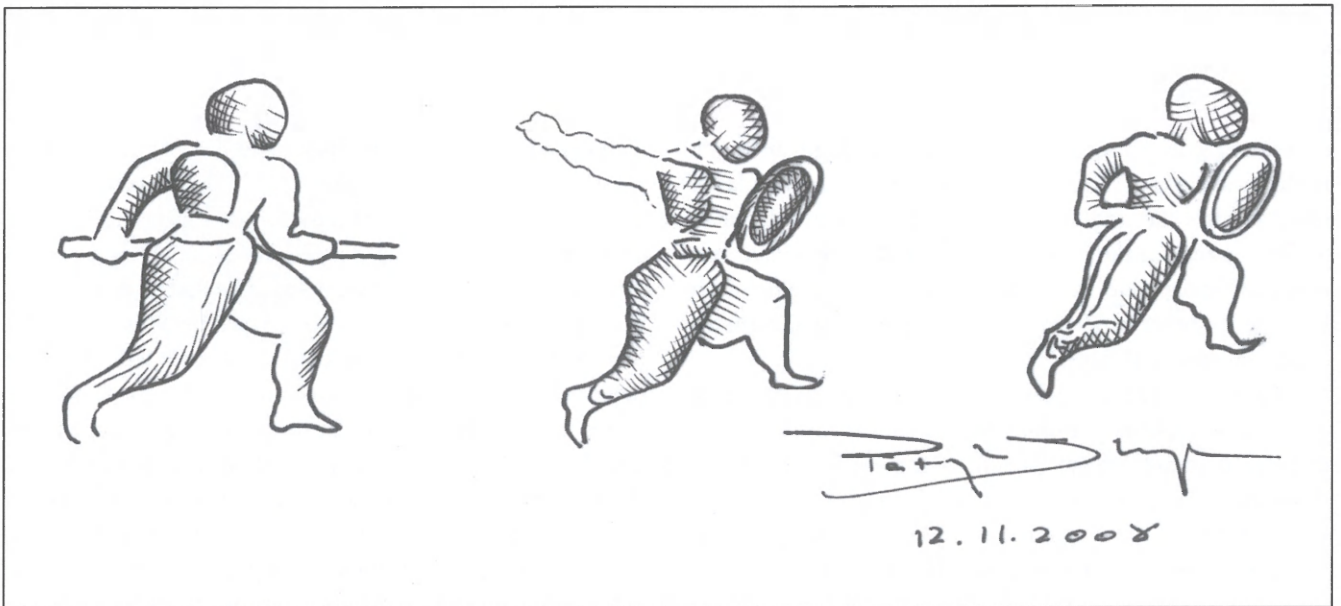


Fig. 7. Hunters from the Nizhne Shakhrovka plate in Hermitage.

confronted with beasts' protomes in medallions³⁷. There is however little doubt what kind of weapon is being applied and that the subject of the depiction is spear combat with the beasts³⁸. A separation of hunters and animals with decorative frames was not uncommon in Sasanian art. This iconographic feature was adopted by the iconography of

early Caliphate art. It should be also stated that in probably Kushano-Sasanian dish from the British Museum one of the personages is depicted in similar pose what is likely to show man performing the spear thrust however no opponent of human or animal kind seem to be visible. The personages on Hermitage plate are identified as representations of Caucasian vassals of the Sasanian state or even Avars³⁹.

³⁷ Medallions with portraits or animal protomes were common motif of Sasanian art.

³⁸ The lack of visible shaft and head of the weapon may raise doubts if a lasso was not the equally possible weapon attested in both scenes of hunting both on horseback and dismounted. It must be emphasized however that the lasso applying personage always move in the direction opposite to the prey or at least stand steady

while the animals move from him as it is impossible to thrust with the lasso. Iconography of hunters confronting the beasts especially when shown on slightly bent knees with feet spread out must therefore be found depictions of the spearmen.

³⁹ P. O. Harper, *The Royal Hunter...*, pp. 53-54, pl. 14; eadem, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, p.134-135.

This clearly contradicts propagandist function of Persian toreutics of the period.

One of the Nizhne Shakhrovka plate hunters carries a large oval shield and has his right arm risen as if hurling a javelin or performing a single handed spear thrust from above the head. This corresponds with the capitals from possibly Sasanian site Husn al Urr in Yemen where among many variously armed personages the hunters with the spears and the shields were depicted⁴⁰. The shields were not uncommon in Sasanian related or Islamic hunting iconography. The tendency to leave the shafted weapons only suggested or avoiding showing the shaft in front of the personage may suggest that one of the foot warriors on Nizhne Shakhrova plate was to depict one personage applying double handed hold of the spear, the other one hitting the spear from above but being covered with shield while the last one would carry shield and sword - combination perhaps not very widespread in the Sasanian art nevertheless attested in related iconography.

b. Hunters 'heroically nude'. This type of depictions might be related with both classical 'heroic nude' and with the Sasanian 'vintage' motives where most of personages are depicted naked. Pose of the unclothed hunters associates with the representations of 'realistic' type. Two examples can be presented: the silver bowl from Cleveland Museum (Fig. 11) of Art and stucco frieze from Qualeh y Yazdajird in Iran⁴¹. Both show the spearmen in similar way however the plaster relief follows the tradition of reluctance to show the shaft or other pieces of the weapon. Additionally the hunted lion is shown in separate frame in different register. The silver bowl on the other hand shows the hunter separated from the quarry by the floral motif.

The semi-circular object in front of the naked spearman on the bowl partially filling the arch made by the floral decoration might be interpreted as a form of the shield. Possibly the deep domed one known from the Central Asian iconography of the Sasanian time but remaining in use in Tibet until 19th century. Naturally the artist employed the canon of showing the hunting spearman and depicted his shield separately from him. Alternatively it might be sort of construction protecting the hunters while enjoying themselves in *paradeisos*.

It must be stated that 'non-royal' depictions of foot hunters from the Sasanian art, both 'realistic' and 'heroically nude' seem clearly inspired by Classical art where spear wielding

hunters were depicted in very similar fashion on easily transferable materials like textiles⁴². These iconographical patterns contain a dose of dynamism of the poses of the main personages of seemingly non-Sasanian origin.

c. The scenes of hunting with the spears in the iconography of the Eastern neighbors of the Sasanian state. Eastern frontier of the Persian Empire is somehow obscure. Firstly due to the lack of sources which would allow define its contour, secondly due to the nature of political organisms laid there which means relics of former Kushan empire on one hand and the states of the peoples arriving from the Central Asian steppe. Also the semi-independent situation of areas belonging to the great houses of Iran seems to blur the contour of Persian boundaries. The division is even less clear when it comes to the material culture.

The Hephtalite stone lid from Gandhara might be related to the Sasanian 'non-royal' hunt on foot mixed with some Indian realities (Fig. 12)⁴³. The composition with a spearman with bent legs and shaft on the hips level directed right towards vertically shown beast either follows Sasanian iconography or origins from the same sources with former being more probable as Hephtalites were keen imitators of Persian patterns.

The scene from the bowl from Sackler collection, manufactured probably in Bactria in IV century is more complicated to interpret (Fig. 13)⁴⁴. The position of the hunter is unknown from the Sasanian art - he is shown while hitting the bear on the right however his weight is moved to the left with his left leg straight and right one bent. The spear is on the shoulder level like on the Seattle Museum of Art plate however is held in different manner with left arm of the personage bent and the right one almost straight. Such pose seems anatomically realistic in showing the resistance to the beast's weight. The treatment the silhouettes and the details show strong classical influence and belong to the school of Eastern silver following Greek traditions long after fall of the Hellenistic states⁴⁵. Despite that many relations may be found with Sasanian art allowing the piece to be attributed to the East Iranian workshop.

3. The spears in the Sasanian non-hunting iconography. The spears depicted in the Sasanian art outside hunting

⁴² Z. Feng, *The Evolution of Textiles Along the Silk Road*, [in:] J.C.Y. Waytt (ed.) *China. Dawn of a Golden Age, 200-750 AD*, New York 2005, p. 71.

⁴³ M. Ghose, *The Impact of the Hun Invasions: A Nomadic Interlude in Indian Art*, "Bulletin of the Asia Institute", vol. 17, Michigan 2003, p. 151, fig. 10; Ghose points Indian traditions present in the depiction however the general similarity to "realistic" and "heroically nude" Sasanian spear hunt iconography seems striking.

⁴⁴ A. C. Gunter, P. Jett, *Ancient Iranian Metalwork in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Freer Gallery of Art*, Washington 1992, pp. 148-155; B.I. Marshak, *Central Asian Metalwork in China...*, p. 49-51.

⁴⁵ P. O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, pp. 126-128, 149, fig 71.

⁴⁰ E. J. Keall, *Carved Stonework from the Hadramawt in Yemen. Is it Sasanian?*, [in:] V.S. Curtis, R. Hillenbrand, J.M. Rogers (ed.), *The Art and Archaeology of Ancient Persia. New Light on the Parthian and Sasanian Empires*, London, New York 1998, pp. 142-148, fig. 1-4; P.O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, p. 76, 103, fig. 44.

⁴¹ E. O. Harper, *Image and Identity: Art of the Early Sasanian Dynasty*, [in:] V.S. Curtis, S. Stewart, *The Idea of Iran*, Vol. 3, *The Sasanian Era*, London-New York 2008, pp. 72-73; K.V. Trever, V. G. Lukonin, op.cit., pp. 87-88.



Fig. 8. Hunter from the Hermitage plate.



Fig. 10 Hunters from Teheran Museum vase.

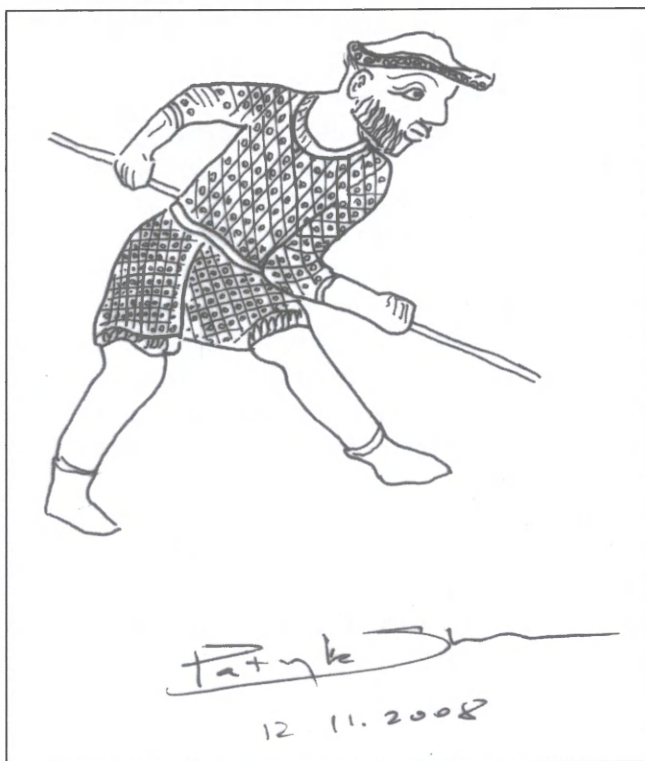


Fig. 9. Hunter from Hermitage Museum plate.

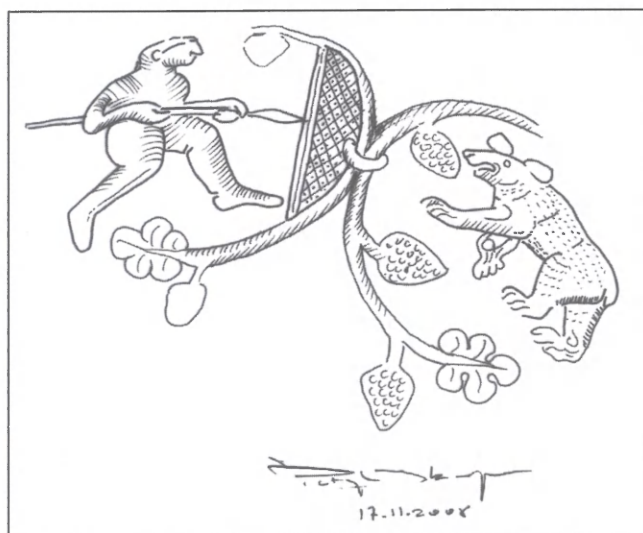


Fig. 11. Hunter from Cleveland Museum of Arts bowl.

context are usually objects of the display of the power or social (cultic?) significance, often playing the role of the scepters⁴⁶. Often they are directed with the heads down showing the lily-flower shaped butts⁴⁷. In few cases the heads are not

visible however on the seals they are very pronounced. The personages depicted holding two shafts may follow Achaemenid *palta*⁴⁸. A seal from British Museum show Bahram IV standing on dead enemy's body with right hand

⁴⁶ P. O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, pp. 122-123, 147, fig. 67; E. Herzfeld, *Kushano-Sasnaian Coins*, New Delhi 1930, p. 28-32.

⁴⁷ O. Grabar, *op.cit.*, p. 66, 112, plate 25, P.O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, p.91-93, 113 fig. 62, Ghulbiyan

fresco seem to present a ruler with spear-scepter with head consisting of leaf-shaped pint and crescent shaped base, see *op.cit.*, p. 122-123, 147, fig. 67.

⁴⁸ O. Grabar, *op.cit.*, pp. 56-57, 100, plate 12.

resting on sword pommel and left one raised and holding the spear with lily flower butt pronounced, triangular head⁴⁹. One of the seal types show two or three personages holding down headed spear. The meaning of the composition remains uncertain, though is associated with some unclear rituals⁵⁰. Other seals show single men thrusting the spears with large, pronounce heads to the ground, while some other crude sigillae may depict personage (demon, Gayomard?) with two spears⁵¹. The type of personage with spear stuck to the ground allows to believe that staves of the fire altar's attendants on some coins from III to mid V centuries might in fact be spears as well⁵². Similar hold of the spears represent two youths with winged horses on plate from Metropolitan Museum⁵³. Personage shown on silver vase from Sackler Collection which was manufactured in East Iran or Bactria rather than in Persia proper, was identified as Dionysus with *tyrsos*⁵⁴. The lily flower finial suggest rather spear than actual *tyrsos*. The Iranian elaboration of Dionysian subjects is often full of misinterpretations. On vase found in China but manufactured in 5-6th century Bactria, one may found depiction of a short spear with globular butt⁵⁵.

Although it might be questioned whether the shafts with no visible heads are indeed spears it must be pointed that analogous objects in similar situations can be found in iconography possessing the heads. What more *Arda Viraz Namag*'s testimony does support the opinion of religious meaning of the spears⁵⁶.

Substantial spear-butts might reflect the Achaemenid tradition meantime heaving practical sense by balancing the spear especially when applied single handed⁵⁷. It is however

more likely that decorative butt had the symbolic meaning. Setting the Iranian frontier by thrusting the spear into the ground must be therefore understood as directing the head into the ground and displaying the butt. It is worth noting that the Achaemenid 'apples' attached to the spear shafts played the role of division of the troops. The lily-flower shaped butts appear also in depictions of the lances⁵⁸.

The row of unarmored warriors of probably Arabic origin on Bishapur frieze show them armed with long swords and spears slightly higher than men. This relates them to depictions from the cities of Iranian-Roman borderland: Hatra, Palmyra and Dura Europos. The spears of similar size are also known from the art of Kushans and their ancestors.

II. The javelins.

Depictions of hurling shafted weapons can be again divided into groups of 'royal' and 'realistic'. The 'royal' javelin hunt is shown mounted while the personage on the 'realistic' depiction is on foot.

1. The 'royal' hunters throwing javelins or darts are depicted on the plates from Tcherdyne (Fig. 14), Berlin (Fig. 15) and on plate found in Kalar-Dasht in Iran (now in Museum Bastan – Teheran). Except the latter they are shown mounting rearing horses. The personage on Tcherdyne and Teheran vessels is holding bunch of spare missiles in the left⁵⁹ hand while the one from Berlin plate is shown grasping the reins with left hand⁶⁰. His knee is sharply bent and a winged putto carries a ribboned wreath in upper right register (winged puttos with ribboned wreaths are known from early Sasanian rock friezes). Position of the horse and sharply bent knee correspond to plate showing Bahram kushanshah fighting boars from Hermitage⁶¹. This might advocate Eastern origin or following Eastern pictorial tradition of the vessel.

Another fragment of the Sasanian silver vessel is preserved in Berlin which originally must have depicted high aristocrat hunting from the horseback⁶². One of the riders accompanying the 'king' on the post-Sasanian and possibly manufactured outside the Persian territory vase

⁴⁹ P. O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, p.13-14, 46, fig. 15-16; eadem, *The Royal Hunter...*, p. 147, pl. 71; D. Shepherd, *Sasanian Art*, [in:] E. Yarshater (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran 3(2) The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge 1983, p. 1100, Pl. 106 a.

⁵⁰ R. Gyselen, *L'Art Sigillaire Sassanide*, Leiden 1997, pp. xlvii-xlvix.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 33-34, pl. VIII-IX.

⁵² R. Göbl, *Sasanian Numismatics*, New York 1990, pp. 18-19, pl. II-IX; the motive was copied by Hephtalite coinage where the objects seem more clearly defined as spears, see K. Vondrovic, *Coins from Gharwal (Afghanistan)*, "Bulletin of the Asia Institute", vol. 17, Michigan 2003, pp. 159-175.

⁵³ P. O. Harper, *The Royal Hunter...*, p. 42-43, pl 8 eadem, *The Heavenly Twins*, Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, vol. 23, 1965, pp. 186-195.

⁵⁴ A. C. Gunter, P. Jett, *Ancient Iranian Metalwork in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Freer Gallery of Art*, Washington 1992, pp. 188-189.

⁵⁵ B.I. Marshak, *Ewer showing Greek mythological scenes*, [in:] A.L. Juliano, J.A.Lerner, *Monks and Merchants. Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China*, New York 2002, pp. 98-100; eadem, *Ewer*, [in:] J.C.Y. Waytt (ed.) *China. Dawn of a Golden Age, 200-750 AD*, New York 2005, pp. 256-257, pl. 257.

⁵⁶ C.3(2v) in: O.M. Chunakova, *Pehleviyskaya bozhestvennaya komediya...*, p. 97.

⁵⁷ P. O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, pp.13-14, 46, fig. 15-16.

⁵⁸ P. O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, p. 179, 186, fig. 96.

⁵⁹ P. O. Harper, P. Meyers, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period...*, pp. 79, 222, Pl. 21; K.V. Trever, V.G. Lukonin, op.cit., 78-79.; B.Marschak, *Silberschatze des Orients. Metallkunst des 3-13. Jahrhunderts und ihre Kontinuität*, Leipzig 1986, pp. 27-28, fig. 10.

⁶⁰ Loc.cit.; P.O. Harper, P. Meyers, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period...*, pp. 68-70, 221, Pl.20, fig 8.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 72-74, 224, Pl. 23; P.O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, pp.122, 146, fig. 65; K.V. Trever, V.G. Lukonin, op.cit., pp. 61-62, 108, il. 14-15; R. Göbl, *Die Numismatik als Quelle zur Kunst der Sasaniden, der Kusän und der iranischen Hunen*, "Bulletin of the Asia Institute", Vol. 1, 1987, pp. 66-69, fig. 16.

⁶² P. O. Harper, P. Meyers, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period...*, pp. 57, 213, Pl. 12.



Fig. 12. Hephtalite stone lid from Gandhara.



Fig. 14. Hunting scene from the Tcherdyne plate.

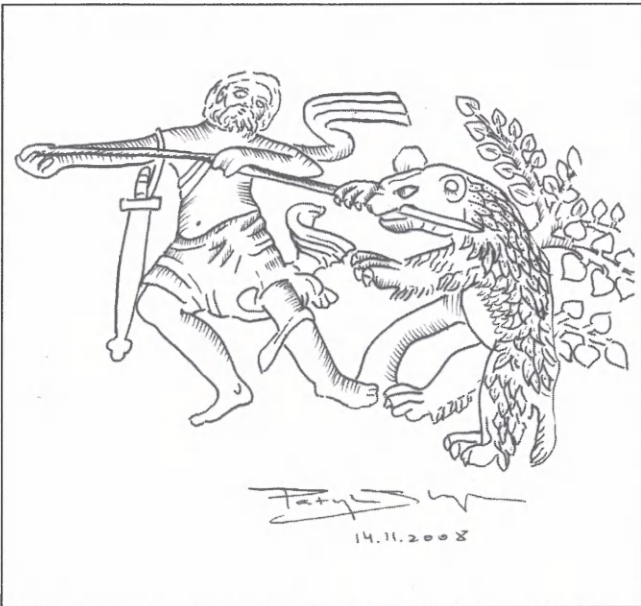


Fig. 13. Hunting scene from silver bowl from Sackler collection.

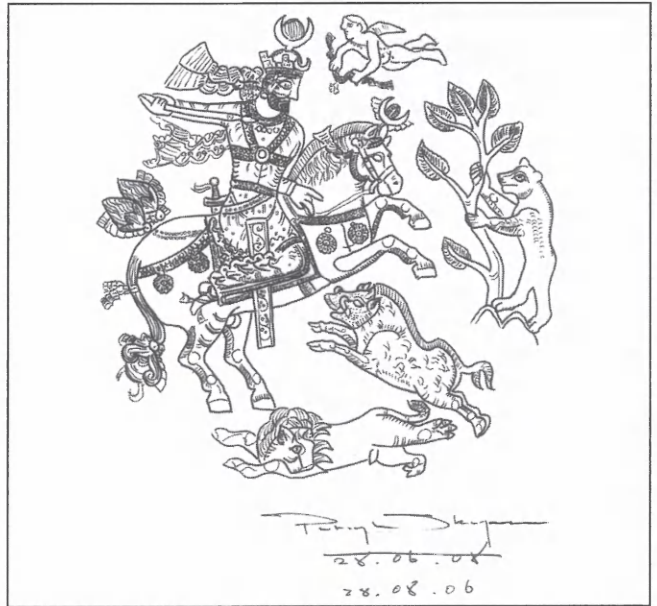


Fig. 15. Hunting scene from Berlin plate.

from Yuldus is also shown as throwing short shaft⁶³. The personage on the latter accompanies the main royal figure as it is common on East Iranian pieces. Just like in case of other objects of Sasanian related iconography of North East neighbors of Eranshahr the comrades of the king are shown in poses which are believed to follow the royal Persian origins. Although no direct Persian source of the javelineer on the Yuldus vase can be pointed other personages follow straight Sasanian patterns. Depictions of the darts throwing

personages might reflect the echoes of the Achaemenid traditions⁶⁴.

The art of javelin-play was one of the highly prized skills of Sasanian courtier as described in *Xusro ud Redag*⁶⁵. The mock javelin combat is still popular sport in Easter Turkey known as *chirit* (surprisingly similar to *pasola* from Indonesian Sumba). Javelins and darts were popular weapons in the later mediaeval and early modern Iran known as

⁶³ V.I. Shlakhova, *Serebranyi sosud iz s. Yuldus (Kurganskaya oblast)*, "Sovetskaya Arkheologia", 4, 1977, pp. 288, 290, fig. 1; P.O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, pp. 128, 150, fig. 71.

⁶⁴ P.O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, pp. 13-14, 46, fig. 15-16.

⁶⁵ 12 in: O.M. Chunakova, *Pehleviyskaya bozhestvennaya komediya...*, p. 149.

zubin and *jerid* with latter being related to mentioned earlier mounted play⁶⁶.

The use of javelin by the Sasanian warriors in the warfare attested by the *pehlevi* texts might be deducted also from the Western sources⁶⁷. All relations of the death of Julian Apostate mention that he was killed by the hurled weapon. Ammianus Marcellinus who normally describes the lances of the Sasanian cavalry as *contus* identifies the weapon which inflicted the fatal wound as the *hasta equitata*. Whoever had hurled the missile it must have been credible that it came from the Persian hand. After copying Persian and Steppe cavalry equipment and tactics, Byzantine cavalry has not ceased employing javelins what is testified by Maurice's *Strategikon*. The darts are however presented as weapons inferior to bows and arrows to be used by inexperienced warriors who have not yet acquired archery skills.

2. 'Non-royal' group is represented by the sole example from the silver vase from the Cleveland Museum of Arts (Fig. 16)⁶⁸. It bears some resemblance to other 'non-royal' realistic hunting depictions - foot position of the personage is similar, hunter is shown dressed in tunic and trousers. The javelineer is shown on foot hurling dart at the bear standing by the tree (no unlike the example of 'Bactrian' vessel from Sackler Collection), he is holding spare javelins in his left hand which corresponds with Berlin plate discussed above. These two tracks may relate the piece with East Iranian workshops however holding additional missiles in free hand could have been common practice before invention of handy dart cases known from later Iranian history. The depictions of bears standing by the trees are known from other Sasanian relics.

It is possible that one of the personages in the vintage from Teheran vase may be shown while throwing a dart or a small javelin at a fox (the depicted movement of the arm reminds the one from Yuldus vase) however equally well it might be a naked boy with a stick⁶⁹.

III. The lances.

These weapons from definition were employed mounted so they appear almost exclusively on the 'royal' iconography. The depictions can be grouped by the way the thrusts are performed or directed, whether they are single or double handed and by the position of the horses. Horses were depicted in Sasanian toreutics in three positions: prancing, in 'flying gallop' and standing.

1. Riders performing double handed downward thrusts

a. Riders on rearing horses. That composition shows show hunters on prancing mounts holding the shaft with

both hands while transfixing the prey located below the horses' front legs. This type is represented by two 19th century drawings of the now lost so-called Burnes plate with lion hunt⁷⁰. Despite the crudity of the material the plate was attributed as Sasanian. The main royal personage on Hephthalite bowl with hunting scenes from British Museum is shown in very similar way however the boars were depicted as his quarry (Fig. 17)⁷¹. The boar confronting the hunter is shown only in front part. It should be pointed that plate from Bastis collection depicting hunter performing single handed thrust (to be discussed below) seems related to that group however personage's left hand is shown holding reins instead lower part of the shaft. Another example of that type of layout is the paining depicting Chinese emperor on the fresco from Afrasiab.

b. Riders on the horses in 'flying gallop'. This type represents the piece which was neither made in Sasanian state nor depicts Persian ruler - the wall painting from Sogdian Afrasiab depicting one of Chinese emperor's trabants spearing the feline. Despite the lack of exclusively Sasanian character the mentioned fresco conveys earlier Persian composition.

c. Riders on the standing horses. That sort of composition might originated from Central Asia and might be related to depiction from the golden clasp from Saksankhur dated I century attributed to Kushan culture (Fig.18)⁷². The Saksankhur clasp shows the rider spearing the boar shown as protome. Two boars with their rears covered by leaves were depicted on Parthian gold clasp and the replacement of the whole animals with their protomes in Sasanian hunting iconography was already well illustrated. The Kushano-Sasanian plate from Hermitage with kushanshah Bahram fighting boars with sword compositionally related to the lance wielding hunters on prancing horses is accompanied by protome of the beast (Fig.19). Animal is represented only partially with its back parts missing. This might suggest Eastern origin of confrontation of the motif of men fighting the animals given in protomes only.

The hands of the hunter on Saksankhur clasp are shown clearly as holding the lance however the shaft itself was not

⁷⁰ E. O. Harper, *Sasanian Silver Vessels: The Formation and Study of Early Museum Collections...*, pp. 53, 91, pl. 29; P.O. Harper, P. Meyers, op.cit., 1981, p. 55-57, 212, Pl. 11a-11b.

⁷¹ B. I. Marshak, Ya.K. Kirkis, *Chilekskiye chashi*, "Trudy Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha", Vol. X, pp. 68-69, fig. 9-10; K. Tanabe, op.cit., pp.174-175; B. Gray, op.cit., 61-62, fig. 3; R. Göbl, *Die Numismatik als Quelle zur Kunst der Sasaniden...*, pp. 71-74, fig. 31; P. O. Harper, P. Meyers, op.cit., p. 129-131, fig. 44; although Harper and Meyers pointed out increasing role of Eastern influences on Sasanian art in the second half of the period it must be stated that the influence was visible before and its opposite direction is more clear.

⁷² G.A. Pugachenkova, *Shedvry Srednei Azii*, Tashkent 1986, p. 187; B.I. Marshak, *Pre-Islamic Painting of the Iranian Peoples and its Sources in Sculpture and Decorative Arts*, [in:] E. Sims, B.I. Marshak, E.J. Grube (ed.), *Peerless Images. Persian Painting and its Sources*, Hong Kong-Singapore 2002, p. 9, fig. 10.

⁶⁶ M. M. Khorasani, op. cit., pp. 250, 638-640, fig. 300-304.

⁶⁷ V. A. Dmitrev, *Vsadniki v sverkeyushchey bronye. Voennoe delo sasanidskogo Irana i istoria rimsko-prsidskih voyin*, St. Petersburg 2008, pp. 66-67.

⁶⁸ B. I. Marshak, *Central Asian Metalwork in China...*, pp. 51-52.

⁶⁹ P. O. Harper, *The Royal Hunter...*, pp. 71-73, fig. 24.



Fig. 16. Hunting scene from Cleveland Museum of Arts bowl.



Fig. 18. Hunting scene on golden clasp from Saksankhur.

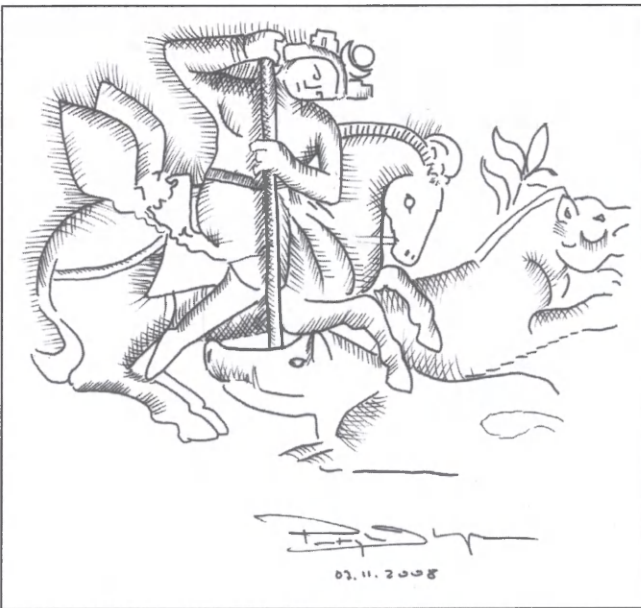


Fig. 17. Hunter from Hephtalite bowl from British Museum.



Fig. 19. Bahram Kushanshah hunting boars from Hermitage bowl.

depicted. Again this might advocate the Eastern origin of the reluctance to show the weapon shafts in Sasanian iconography. What is interesting the shafts are not always absent or shown transparent. It would be however difficult to determine the reason behind artists' choice to show or omit the shaft. It is however tempting to ascribe the invisible weapons and protomes of the quarries as the result of Saka influence.

In strictly Sasanian art there are no direct followers of this pattern however the best known example of the hunter on standing horse is the post Sasanian stucco frieze from Chal Tarkhan (Fig. 20) which seems to devotedly follow the Skasankhur example in composition layout including reduction of the animal into the protome, however showing the full lance shaft including the lily flower butt. It is likely that the

authors of the Chal Tarkhan stucco followed undiversified Iranian tradition. The other example is Sogdian plate depicting a ruler killing one lion standing vertically on the left and having the other one lying under mount's hooves (Fig. 21)⁷³. Similarly are shown attendants of the 'Chinese Emperor' on the wall paintings from Afrasiab.

In burnt fragments of wooden sculpture from Panjikent there are preserved panels with riders positioned over quarries however no weapon can be seen⁷⁴. The horses are shown

⁷³ B. I. Marshak, *Soghdian Silver*, Moskva 1971, pp.120.

⁷⁴ A. M. Belenickiy, *Monumentalnoye isskusstvo Pendzhikenta*, Moskva 1973, pp. 34-36, Pl. 48-49, A.M. Belenizki, *Mittelasiien*.



Fig. 20. Hunting scene from Chal Tarkhan stucco frieze.



Fig. 22. Hunter and the lion from Yuldus vase.



Fig. 21. Hunting scene from sogdian plate.

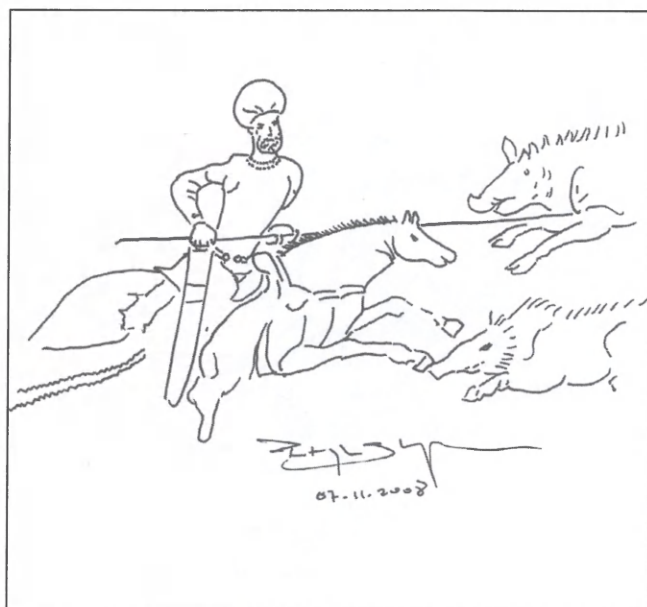


Fig. 23. Graffiti from Hatra - the hunting scene.

once as standing and the other time prancing. Composition of the panels suggest that originally the lances were most likely represented there.

d. Backwards thrust. This method was shown on main depiction on Yuldus vase (Fig. 22)⁷⁵. This vessel was mentioned when discussing the scenes of the mounted hunting with javelins. The royal personage on the Yuldus vase rides the horse shown in 'flying gallop' to the left. The rump

Kunst der Sogden, Leipzig 1980, pp. 144-145, Pl. 74, 76. Personages depicted on the murals of Varakhsha although mounted on elephants and fighting griffons hold lances in upper two handed frontal hold, cataphract hold and in backwards thrust..

⁷⁵ V. I. Shlyakhova, *op.cit.*, p. 289-291, fig. 2.b.

of the mount is being attacked by the lion and the rider turns back in the saddle thrusting the lance downwards and backwards. Shlyakhova has mistakenly interpreted the weapon as lasso however the stiff butt is clearly visible while the lassoes in Sasanian art are always finished with a loop. One of the personages on the vase is shown having lasso in properly Sasanian stylization. Also on none of the Sasanian examples the rope is held with right hand raised and left lowered. It should be noted that all Sasanian hunters employing lasso are shown holding the rope on hips level with the hand away from the beast holding the loops of unused lariat of the line. With whole certainty it must be stated that 'king' from the Yuldus vase is shown holding the lance and not lasso. Additionally there is a relation between this depiction and

the lance wielding riders from above mentioned depictions of downward double handed thrusts.

The technique applied by the chieftain on Yuldus vessel clearly corresponds to depictions of so-called 'Parthian shot'. Position of the predator and the hunter deny possibility of intentional presentation of making an assault to the side which was suggested by Takeuchi in regard to archery⁷⁶. Shahname mentions efficient backward thrust in combat. This technique is known from later Persian iconography.

2. The 'cataphract-clibanarius thrust'. Surprisingly, despite the widespread combat employment of double handed lance hold parallel to the ground either alongside (cataphract) or across horse's neck (*clibanarius*), there are scant visual sources showing this technique in hunt⁷⁷. The existing ones originate from either outside Iran proper or not from Sasanian era. To list examples of: hunt scene from Kosika cup⁷⁸, Parthian tile with armored rider spearing the lion from Babylonia, late Parthian graffiti from Hatra (Fig. 23)⁷⁹, late Parthian or early Sasanian graffiti from Dura Europos⁸⁰ and probably Hephtalite bowl from Hermitage (Fig. 24)⁸¹. The latter may be supplemented with Hephtalite lid from Gandhara presenting the same technique in the hunt scene (Fig. 25)⁸². Iranian influence in these pieces can not be questioned however clear distinction between Hephtalite and Sasanian styles must be stated.

Ironically the Isola Rizza plate not being Sasanian and not being hunt depiction follows the most typical composition of Sasanian hunt scenes i.e. rider killing prey on the right having the other one stretched below. It may illustrate how the iconographical arrangements were transmitted between the cultures and between the subjects. For the current paper the combat scenes with fantastic creatures were avoid however their layout clearly originates in depictions of hunting real animals⁸³.

Relatively scant representations of 'cataphract hold' in hunting scenes might have resulted from unsuitability of this technique for hunting as most animals are targets



Fig. 24. Hunting lancer from Hephtalite bowl from Hermitage collection.



Fig. 25. Hunting scene on Hephtalite lid from Gandhara.

⁷⁶ R. Takeuchi, *The Parthian Shot in Hunting Scenes*, "Silk Road Art and Archaeology", vol. 10, 2004, pass.

⁷⁷ M. Mielczarek, *Cataphract and Clibanarii. Studies on the Heavy Armoured Cavalry of the Ancient World*, Łódź 1993, pass.

⁷⁸ P. O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, p. 11, 43, fig. 12 a,b.

⁷⁹ E. O. Harper, *Image and Identity...*, p. 79.

⁸⁰ S. James, *Excavation at Dura Europos 1928-1937. Final Report VII. The Arms and Armour and other Military Equipment*, London 2004, pp. 39-40, fig. 17.

⁸¹ V. P. Nikonorov, *The Armies of Bactria 700BC-450AD*, Stockport 1997, pp. 18, 78, Fig. 46; B.I. Marshak, *Central Asian Metalwork in China*, pp. 49-51; K. Tanabe, *op.cit.*, p.174-175

⁸² M. Ghose, *op.cit.*, p. 151-154; Ghose has admitted dependence of the scene from Sasanian origins.

⁸³ Similar composition of the combat scene one may find on burnt panels from Sogdian Bunjikat showing heroes fighting other warriors and demons, see: E.V. Zeimal (ed.) *Drevnosti Tadjikistana*, Dushanbe 1985, pp. 274-276.

lower than riders' hips and would force lowering the lances head which was not possible with '*clibanarius* hold' hence all hunt depictions with that type of fighting method show the 'cataphract hold' enabling lowering and rising of the lance head. Still it seems that fighting men allowed the full efficiency of the technique.

3. Single handed downwards thrust. That technique was shown on Bastis collection plate (Fig. 26)⁸⁴, seals from Berkeley and British Museum collections with rider hitting

⁸⁴ O. Grabar, *op.cit.*, p. 50-52, 94, pl. 4.

the monster⁸⁵ and plate with Yazdagird slaying a bull from Siberian Family Synya collection (Fig. 27)⁸⁶ and on post Sasanian or even Byzantine silk from Mozac⁸⁷. All these show different mounts positions - the first one presents prancing horse, the second the standing horse and the last a bull in 'flying gallop'. The shaft on the Bastis plate is not shown where it would cover body of the rider and the mount, the rider is shown holding reins with his left hand and with right knee sharply bent - this relates it to the plates from Berlin and Tcherdyne showing the hunters hurling javelins. A winged putto holding a wreath emphasizes the relation with plate from Berlin. Depictions of single handed lance thrust technique seem however Western influence in the Sasanian iconography or might reflect survival of Achaemenid traditions. One of the possible sources of this motive could be a mosaic from Palmyra showing Bellerofont in Iranian dress on Pegasus killing Hydra with lance held single handed above the head⁸⁸. Mozac textile clearly follows this tradition.

Siberian plate with Yazdigird show him riding a bull and killing another one with long shafted weapon with head which might be interpreted as crescent shape one - similarly as on the plate from Metropolitan Museum showing Yazdigird on foot slaying the deer (Fig. 3). The unusual mount of the king could have political meaning and describe the Eastern location of his victories (as Nandi bulls designated Shiva worshippers) or could recall legend of Feridun who was riding a cow and used to hunt from bovine's back before his rebellion against Zahak what again may hide astronomical or astrological meaning⁸⁹. The king is said to hold his mount's ear with left hand. This would indicate the bull as one of king's preys as in numerous Sasanian depictions holding beast's ear signifies heroism of the hunter⁹⁰. Personage riding his prey is shown on plate with Shapur II killing deer from British Museum and on one of the stucco friezes from Chal Tarkhan⁹¹. In Tabari's relation of Bahram Gur's accession to the throne young prince was to kill two lions and he rode one before killing them both. Riding a beast before killing it might be one of heroic feats to be performed by hunter, similarly to kidnapping the feline's cub or fighting several boars simultaneously. The composition of the plate



Fig. 26. Scene from Bastis collection plate.



Fig. 27. Yazdagird slaying bull on Synya family plate.

⁸⁵ P. O. Harper, *In Search of a Cultural Identity...*, p. 179, 186, fig. 96.

⁸⁶ A. V. Baulo, *Sasanidskoe serebranoie blyudo s r. Synya*, [in:] *Arkheologia, etnografia i antropologia Evraii*, Novosibirsk 2002, pp. 142-148.

⁸⁷ R. Hillenbrand, *What Happened to the Sasanian Hunt in Islamic Art?*, [in:] V.S. Curtis, S. Stewart (ed.) *The Idea of Iran*, Vol. 4, *The Rise of Islam*, New York 2009, pp. 90-91, fig. 5;

⁸⁸ P. O. Harper, *Image and Identity: Art of the Early Sasanian Dynasty*, p. 79-80.

⁸⁹ P. Pourshariati, *op.cit.*, p. 373-374.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 75-76.

⁹¹ P. O. Harper, *The Royal Hunter. Art of the Sasanian Empire*, New York 1978, pp. 34-35, 116, pl. 4, 48; P.O. Harper, P. Meyers, *Silver Vessels of the Sasanian Period*, Vol. I: *Royal Imagery*, New York 1981, pp. 57-60, 214, Pl. 13.

and king's position seem to suggest that it might belonged to the group of 'two handed downwards thrusts' depictions, however Baulo who had opportunity to see the vessel himself had identified it as held single handed⁹².

The head of Yazdagird's weapon is more clearly depicted as crescent shaped. In this highly symbolic scene it can not be determined whether it reflects the shape of actual hunting weapon or is a requisite of emblematic content. Yazdagird's nickname 'the sinner' suggests involvement in unorthodox religious movements or simply tolerance towards non-Zoroastrians. Double head of his arm could

⁹² *Ibidem* pp. 79-80

reflect a forgotten mythological emblem similar to much later double-headed Muhammad's sword *Zulfiqar*. It must be however pointed that preventing too deep penetration could be perfectly understandable with spears used on foot but not necessarily practical with lance which needed the application of recovery technique anyway while sudden increase of resistance would be able even to unhorse the rider. Coins of Kushan kings and kushanshahs show them armed with tridents associating them with Shiva⁹³. Presence of nandi bulls and mysterious crescent headed weapon seem play some role in symbolic drama presented on Sinya plate.

The employment of combat forks *mezraq* in mediaeval and modern Iran would be an argument for existence of similar weapons in earlier periods however one can not exclude possibility that symbolic iconography inspired Safavid warriors⁹⁴. It must be additionally stated that combat forks' shafts were of less than moderate length which suits the Yazdigird I Metropolitan Museum of Art plate but does not relate to Siberian plate. Double pointed hunting lance is known from late Roman mosaic from Piazza Armerina in Sicily. This may advocate Baulo's opinion of exclusively hunting character of the weapon however the Roman depiction represents the hunting hares or rabbits which being light prey would not create rapid resistance endangering riders stability.

Conclusions

The variety of shafted weapons in Sasanian hunting iconography is much wider than of such weapons in combat scenes where only long lances or *konto*i employed in the 'cataphract hold' are depicted. Because hunting was not only a pastime but also military exercise and the testimonies for employment of shafted weapons different than long lances it may advocate employment of varied shafted weapons by warriors. What more the hunting scenes prove that lances were used in different manners especially when the target was lower than personage performing a thrust. Ability of the lancers to hit marks in relatively different ranges: on the ground, in front and even close on the mounts rump prove that Sasanian riders knew the ways to manipulate the grip in order to adjust required length. Later Persian combat representations show variety of the ways the lances were held without resigning from 'cataphract hold'. Asian tradition of lance fighting emphasized flexibility and ability to hit targets in various directions even at the cost of crushing power which was a backbone of idea of efficiency of European armored lance-equipped cavalry. Sasanian hunting scenes prove that Asian school of lance employment was at least partially developed in Iran of the discussed era.

Depictions of the foot hunters prove that shafts of not excessive lengths were employed as well. Examples from non-hunting iconography support that view further. Also javelins were not only hunting weapons but had wide employment in combat. The only weapons which might have exclusively hunting application were the crescent headed shafts associated with Yazdigird I. These however might be only iconographic emblems without material sources.

Streszczenie

Pomimo, że w obiektach sztuki sasanidzkiej o tematyce łowieckiej najczęściej spotykaną bronią jest łuk i strzały, przedstawienia myśliwskie stanowią bogate źródło wiedzy o użyciu innych rodzajów oręża: jak różne rodzaje broni drzewcowej, miecze, arkany, sztylety, a nawet gołe ręce. Artykuł omawia przedmioty artystyczne, różnych mediów (toreutyki, gliktyki, stiuku, reliefy kamienne, graffito i malarstwo ścienne) ukazujące wykorzystanie włóczni w polowaniu pieszym, oszczepów oraz lanc, rozumianych jako broń kolną o długim drzewcu, stosowaną w walce wręcz z konia.

Ikonografia sasanidzka pojmowana jest szeroko, z uwzględnieniem obiektów pokrewnych sztuce perskiej omawianego okresu. Stąd uwzględnienie elementów ikonografii późnopartyjskiej, wschodnioirańskiej (w tym heftalickiej) i postsasanidzkiej.

Analiza średnioperskich terminów opisujących broń drzewcową nie pozwala na rekonstrukcję terminologii dotyczącej włóczni i oszczepów w okresie sasanidzkim. Możliwe, że nomenklatura nie była bardzo precyzyjna. Wskazano na istotną rolę symboliczną włóczni w kulturze przedislamskiego Iranu.

Grupę przedstawień polowań za pomocą włóczni podzielono na ikonografię łowów królewskich oraz „niekrólewskich”, które to podzielono dalej na „realistyczne” oraz ukazujące myśliwych w „heroicznej nagości”. Zdecydowana większość przedstawień ukazuje łowcę zadającego pchnięcie włócznią dzierżoną na wysokości pasa, choć wskazano również przykłady, gdy drzewce trzymane są na wysokości barków. Możliwe, że część obiektów ukazuje myśliwych używających tarczy i zadających pchnięcie z głową, lub miotających oszczep, czego nie da się określić z uwagi na stan zabytków i tendencję artystów sasanidzkich do pomijania drzewca, gdyby ten miał wychodzić przed przedstawiane obiekty. Stwierdzono istnienie włóczni o długości niewiele przekraczającej wysokość człowieka w ikonografii sasanidzkiej nie dotyczącej polowań.

Przykłady przedstawień myśliwych z oszczepami pochodzą głównie z ikonografii „królewskiej” i ukazują łowców na koniach. Odnotowano jednak jeden obiekt obrazujący postać bez korony, pieszo, zabijającą oszczepami

⁹³ Trever, Lukonin, *op.cit.*, p. 64-70.

⁹⁴ L. Kobyliński, *Persian and Indo-Persian arms*, [in:] A. R. Chodyński, *Persian and Indo-Persian Arms and Armour of 16th-19th Century from Polish Collections*, Malbork 2000, pp. 67, 338-340, Pl. 206-209; M. M. Khorasani, *op.cit.*, pp. 248-250, 638, 643-646, Pl. 301, 311-318.

niedźwiedzia. Wzmiankowano, że oszczepy stanowiły również broń bojową.

Długie włócznie używane z wierzchowca nazwano umownie „lancami”. Wyróżniono następujące typy przedstawień łowców z „lancami”: uderzających bronią trzymaną oburącz w dół (typ podzielono dalej według pozycji konia: stojącego dęba, w „lejącym galopie” i stojącego), uderzających oburącz za siebie, trzymających drzewce w pozycji katafrakty/klibanariusza, oraz wykonujących jedną ręką pchnięcie w dół.

Krótką analizą ikonografii myśliwskiej wskazała na różnorodność broni drzewcowych używanych w sasanidzkim Iranie oraz różnorodność metod użycia „lanc”, co stoi w sprzeczności z opinią jakoby wojownicy sasanidzcy stosowali wyłącznie bardzo długie „lance” stosując je wyłącznie do najeżdżania na przeciwnika, dzierżąc broń oburącz na wysokości pasa wzdłuż, lub w poprzek szyi konia.