In the sphere of scientific research concerning especially a PRIN investigation in Central Asia during my sabbatical leave 2004/2005, I had the occasion to promote an unofficial mission comprising of, besides the present writer and the Venetian colleagues Simone Cristoforetti and Stefano Pellò, also Dr. Matteo Compareti and Dr. Rudy Favaro (art historian from the University of Trieste). It occurred twice in January/February 2005 (Kermān Province) and between May 5th-25th in the provinces of Tebrān, Qazvin, Zanğān, Ardabil, Eastern Ādharbāygān, Western Ādharbāygān, Kordestān, Kermānsāb, Hamedān, Markazi, and Esfahān. The period spent at Tebrān was also a good occasion to visit museums and libraries and, above all, to get acquainted with the works of the Iranian colleagues. The following notes are dealing with some results of these missions.

Gianroberto Scarcia

1. Newly found capitals kept at Tāq-e Bostān

The iconography of the Mazdean divinities in the Iranian world represents a fascinating field of research not yet deeply investigated. Important archaeological discoveries shed some fresh light on the Sogdian pantheon, but it is not possible to say much about Persian divinities during the pre-Islamic period. Some hints to possible representations of Mazdean divinities will be given in the present paper without any pretence to have reached a definitive solution to the problem.

The recent visit to the monuments at Tāq-e Bostān revealed an interesting and pleasant surprise since not only a wooden

1 See my «The Indian Iconography of the Sogdian Divinities: the archaeological and the textual evidence» in Proceedings of the 5th ICAANE (International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East), Madrid. See also the most recent archaeological reports about the site of Panğaqand: Maršak, Raspopova, et alii, 2004: figs. 117-120, 127-128.
structure had been recently built to protect several column-capitals considered Sasanian, which were displayed until few years ago in an untidy way in the park of that site, but also pedestals and explanatory plates were added. The group of capitals (which present different sizes and have been transported here from other sites)\textsuperscript{2} comprises the three capitals said to have been originally from Bisotun (figs. 12-14), the one from Qal’e-ye Kohne (fig. 1), the one from Venderni (fig. 2), two other figural ones which will be described below (figs. 16-18), three undecorated (fig. 3)\textsuperscript{3} and, above all, two capitals newly found in Kermānsāh (figs. 4-6, 10-11).

The Bisotun capitals were transported to Tāq-e Bostān around the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century possibly to embellish a Qāghār palace built there between 1854-1867 and demolished in 1963. The other capitals from Qal’e-ye Kohne and Venderni arrived at the same site between 1962-63.\textsuperscript{4} One figural capital displayed at Tāq-e Bostān, in particular, attracted immediate attention because of some uncommon features and also because of its exceptional state, which allows recognition of many elements in detail (fig. 5). This piece is said to have been discovered in the area around the new mosque of Kermānsāh and thrown into the river Ābšūrān which was transformed later in a sewer. Fortunately, the Mirāth-e Farhangi of Kermānsāh recovered and brought it to Tāq-e Bostān together with another capital said to have been found in the foundations of the building just behind

\textsuperscript{2} Some capitals are said to be originally from Bisotun where Khosrow II had a palace: Luschey, 1968. That site is known today as Farhād-tarāš: Trümppelmann, 1968; Salzmann, 1976. The literature on the Sasanian figural capitals is now quite extensive: Luschey, 1968; Kleiss, 1968; Kleiss, 1983; Kleiss, 1990; Luschey, 1996.a. See also: von Gall, 1990.a: 99; Russo, 2004 with bibliography. Curiously, the Japanese archaeological mission that investigated the site of Tāq-e Bostān did not report at all about the figural capitals there: Fukai, Horiuchi, Tanabe, Domyo, 1984. On the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century capital found not far from Širāz which should be considered a fire altar, see: Gignoux, 1991: 9-10. A figural capital found in Yemen has been associated to the period of the Sasanian occupation of that Southern Arabian region: Keall, 1995. Sasanian architectonic elements (with clear Byzantine borrowings) were re-employed for the construction of the Friday Mosque in Ṣanḥā’: Fister, 1978: pls. 57-69. See also: Robin, 2005-2006: 26, 28-29.

\textsuperscript{3} More than one capital considered Sasanian present no figural decoration: Luschey, 1968: figs. 3-5, pls. 3-6; Kleiss, 1983: fig. 2; Luschey, 1998: 329, fig. 6.1-2. Possibly, this is the result of a deliberate destruction by iconoclasts. Some non-figural capitals were found in Ḥāḏībād as well: Luschey, 1996.b: pl. 62, 2-3. Three non-figurative Sasanian capitals were re-employed in an emāmzāde in the region of Bušehr (Fārs): Gaube, 1980: 154, pl. 31, 2-3.

\textsuperscript{4} Luschey, 1979: 403-404.
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the new mosque, today transformed in the local police station. It seems that this is another case of a fortuitous finding, which will not shed particular light on the chronology of such objects. In fact, unfortunately, none of the Sasanian capitals currently known have been recovered during scientific excavations. The capital under examination has been recently classified among the so-called «basket» typology – very diffused in Byzantine art since 6th century – according to its shape.

These capitals present both sides embellished with vegetal decorations alternated with two single human busts represented in the act of giving and receiving a beribboned pearl disk. One of the human figures represents, in all probability, a bearded armed king, possibly the same king in the sculpture in the upper part of the bigger grotto at Ṭāq-e Bostān. In fact, the crown, the weapons, the three-pendant necklace and the drop-like-gems originally sewn on the royal garments are all present exactly as observed on the central figure of the rock relief just mentioned. The only concrete difference is constituted of a nimbus behind the head of the king in the capitals. In the newly found capital, details as the beard are still visible, while in the other figural capitals the faces have been deleted on purpose, exactly as in Ṭāq-e Bostān reliefs. The figure on the opposite side of the capital under examination is also of a male character as evidenced by the beard.

5 I owe to Dr. Siyāmāk Khadivi, Director of the Mirāth-e Farhangi at Kermānshāh, much of the information on these capitals. During my visit at the site of Ṭāq-e Bostān in February 2006, Dr. Khadivi insisted on the necessity to make excavations under the new mosque at Kermānshāh where there was for sure an important Sasanian monument.

6 According to E. Russo (cf.: Gayet, 1895: 129), the adoption of the basket typology was borrowed by the Byzantines from Persia in the 5th century (and not vice versa around 6th century as commonly thought, see: Huff, 1993: 45-46) and such a supposed Sasanian influence can be observed for the first time in the decoration of the 6th century church of Saint Polyeuctos (Constantinople): Russo, 2004. On some evident Sasanian elements in the decoration of Saint Polyeuctos church: Strube, 1984: 61-77. An interesting 6th century miniature from the Rossano Codex Cathedral (Calabria, Italy) with the entry into Jerusalem could constitute a good parallel for the attitude of the arms of the figures in the Sasanian capitals: Talbot Rice, 1963: ill. 45. In the Rossano Codex there are other details clearly borrowed from Sasanian Persia as the beribboned birds in the miniature with the last supper: Grabar, 1966: fig. 230.

still visible on some parts of the face (figs. 4, 6). He is dressed as the chain-armored horseman statue reproduced in the inferior part of the bigger grotto at Taq-e Bostan (fig. 7) except for the face which is not covered. He also wears a beribboned helmet, the characteristic three-pendant necklace, a cloak embellished with a three-dot decoration (visible on the sleeves), and a cloak, which partially covers the chain-armor. On each shoulder there is a spherical-like object not easily identified. There is a nimbus behind his head and he has no weapons: just for these details his identification with a god can be considered correct. Pictures of one side of the capital with the god have been published at least on two occasions, while on the Internet it is possible to find a good image of the king on the opposite side.

It is very likely that this capital is strictly linked to the rock relief of the bigger grotto at Taq-e Bostan, a singular enigmatic monument which, in our opinion, cannot be considered emblematic of Sasanian art. Although it is not the intention of the present paper to discuss about the chronology of this unique rock relief, the proposal to date it to the late Sasanian period seems more convincing, independently if the šābanšāh represented there should be identified with Khosrow II (590-628) or Ardašir III (628-629). An interesting observation has been advanced by H. von Gall, who suggested to recognize Firuz (459-484) in the

8 In the past, the opinion that the figures represented in the act of giving the beribboned ring were all to be identified as the goddess Anāhitā was accepted unanimously: BIER, 1985: 1010. Tanabe recognized them even as representations of the Dēn: TANABE, 1984.a: 42-43. However, all these previous identifications should be emended since some divinities on the capitals clear represent male figures.


10 AZARNOUCH, CHEGINI, 2001: 306; KOCH, SANE, 2001: 185. According to Azarnouch and Chegini the relief should be identified as a representation of «Khosrow II as a victorious warrior».

11 See: http://www.sasanika.com/

12 Taq-e Bostan is also unusually located since the most of the Sasanian rock carvings are in Fars: HARPER, 1999. A recent study tried even to show that Taq-e Bostan was the monumental tomb of Khosrow II: HEIDARI, 2002. It is worth observing that, according to Muslim authors, Khosrow II would have been buried in a royal tomb: CHRISTENSEN, 1944: 496.

rock relief of the bigger grotto at Taq-e Bostan, while the king on the capitals should be considered Khosrow II on the basis of (minor) differences of their crowns and also because, as already observed, the šahanšah on the capitals has always a nimbus.\textsuperscript{14} It is also worth noting that the chain-armored horseman at Taq-e Bostan presents some differences in contrast to the divine figure in the capital (a helmet which covers completely the face and, above all, a quiver attached to his flank and a long spear in his hands – in fact, Mazdean divinities normally do not have weapons in Sasanian monuments) but these details do not constitute a definitive evidence for a different identification or chronology of the two sculptures.

Very recently, Y. Moradi has proposed to identify the chain-armored figures, both in the capital and in the rock relief of the bigger grotto, as the Iranian god of victory Verethragna (Bahram).\textsuperscript{15} The identification seems to be convincing and it is supported by some religious sources where among the ten avatāras of the god there is also the armed warrior.\textsuperscript{16} The same Persian scholar had also already attempted to recognize the divinity carved on one side of another Sasanian capital kept in the park of the Čehel Sotún Palace in Isfahan as a representation of Verethragna. In this case, the figure is almost destroyed but it is still possible to observe a flaming nimbus behind the head and a beribboned ring in the right hand (fig. 8). Moradi correctly associated this divinity with a series of controversial coins minted during the reign of Khosrow II with exactly the same subject on the reverse (fig. 9) but, in this case, the reason for an identification with Verethragna does not appear justified.\textsuperscript{17} In fact, the iconography of the chain-armored god on the capital at Taq-e Bostan is definitely different

\textsuperscript{14} von Gall, 1984.
\textsuperscript{15} Moradi, 2003.
\textsuperscript{16} Boyce, 1989: 63. The chain-armored horseman at Taq-e Bostan has been proposed to be identified with Khosrow II (see: Herzfeld, 1920: 82-84) and with the Fravāši of Ardašir III: Tanabe, 1981; Harper, 1987: 588. Such an identification is to be refused since the Fravāši are female warriors: Skjærvø, 2005: n. 24. Representations of the Fravāši as women have been recognized in a Sogdian painting at Panjakand: Maršak, 1990: 297-298. P. Soucek proposed to identify the two winged victories in the spandrels at Taq-e Bostan as Fravāši: Soucek, 1974: 38. The chain-armored horseman has been connected by Tanabe to the Sasanian king because of the presence of the so-called «tassel» attached to the horse and normally associated to royal characters: Tanabe, 1980. However, at Taq-e Bostan, other principles of Sasanian art were not respected. Furthermore, in the light of this new capital, the identification with Verethragna seems more convincing. See also: Kellens, 1973.
\textsuperscript{17} Moradi, 2002-2003.
from the one of the other divinity with the flaming nimbus who is represented in the coins without beard. Then, R. Gyselen had already advanced some possible identifications for the god with flaming nimbus taking into consideration the existing literature on the series of Khosrow II coins. It does not seem the case of Anāhitā (see below) or the wife of Khosrow II and neither of Mithra, who would have had a rayed nimbus behind his head. Most likely this is a representation of the god of fire (cautiously identified as Ādhur) or the personification of the royal glory (Xvarnah). The same French author published recently at least three inscribed Sasanian seals with the representation of a chair-armor horseman identical to the equestrian figure in the bigger grotto at Tāq-e Bostān. The only evident difference in the seals is given by the absence of the nimbus.

As a last note on the identification of Verethragna in Sasanian art, it would be worth remembering a rock relief at Naqš-e Rağāb, dated to the period of Ardašir I (224-241), where a small figure of

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18 Among those who still recognize that divinity on coins with Anāhitā, see: Malek, 2002. Iconographic characteristics of Mithra can be observed in some Sasanian seals and in one rock carving just at Tāq-e Bostān: Callieri, 1990. A figural stone receptacle from Bişāpur considered to be an ossuary presents four divinities on each side. They have been identified as: Mithra, Zūrvan, Ādhur, and Anāhitā: Ghirshman, 1948; Ghirshman, 1961: figs. 99-100; Ghirshman, 1982: fig. 210. According to Ghirshman, the object was stored in the Irān-e Bāstān Museum but I could not find any trace of it. I am grateful to Shahrokh Razmū for the help in the search of this object. On a probable representation of Anāhitā in an Achaemenid seal – but represented according to a more ancient Near-Eastern iconography, standing on a lion and with a rayed nimbus – see: Boardman, 2000: 5.19. In the Kušān coins the iconography of Mithra presented already a rayed nimbus: Herzfeld, 1938: fig. 5. A post-Sasanian dish kept in the State Hermitage Museum presents a possible representation of the Sun God together with the Moon God Māh on a bull-drawn chariot: Harper, Meyers, 1981: 117-118, pl. 35. A second plate with a rude representation of the same scene is now kept in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: Frye, 1965: fig. 85. For other possible representations of Māh in Sasanian seals: Herzfeld, 1941: pl. CXXXI. The two points of the crescent coming from the shoulders of the Moon God have been a characteristic observed also in Kušān coins: Herzfeld, 1938: fig. 5; Rosenfield, 1967: 80-81.

19 Gyselen, 2000: 302-308. See also: Gignoux, 1978: 25, pl. V. A probable representation of Xvarnah has been found in the painting at Gulbyan, a region of modern Afghanistan comprised into the Sasanian Empire but quite far from the main centers of irradiation of Sasanian art. The god is sitting on a throne, he has a nimbus behind his head and a ram head under his feet. Another god recognizable in the same painting is probably Tištṝya: Lee, Grenet, 1998: 82-83. For a representation of Ādhur (AΘΩΟ) in Kušān coins: Herzfeld, 1938: fig. 28; Rosenfield, 1967: 76.

Heracles appear between the king and Ahura Mazdā. The iconography of Heracles, in fact, has been connected to Verethragna because of some hints with Parthian art and, above all, because of the inscribed monuments from Nemrud Dağ. However, there is a long period of time between the execution of the two monuments and, as it is often remarked in the present paper, Tāq-e Bostān represents an anomaly in Sasanian art. It is here proposed an identification with Verethragna for the chain-armor warrior in the monuments at Tāq-e Bostān: probably, the Iranian iconography supposedly borrowed from the Hellenistic Heracles could have been already abandoned around 7th century.

The second figural capital newly found and recently published by Moradi together with the one with Verethragna presents a very similar scheme with a king and an enigmatic divinity on opposite sides although its conditions are very bad (fig. 10). The only interesting detail is given by the two identical sides which do not present a vegetal decoration as the other capitals, but a geometric one resembling a swastika (fig. 11). The repetition of the motif calls to mind water, but it is difficult to say if there is any connection between this decoration and the divinity. The hole carved on its top suggests that the capital was probably used for ablutions during the Islamic period. So, it could be supposed that at least this capital was used in a religious building (possibly a mosque) still existing after the Arab invasion. Exactly as the god proposed to be identified with Verethragna (figs. 4, 6), the unknown divinity on this second capital wears a kind of cloak closed with a jewel on the chest. Also the divinities on the other capitals to be considered present the same cloak; however, as we shall note below (besides the ones in figs. 15 and 17 who are very indistinct), only the god in fig. 14 was not proposed to be

21 Vanden Berghe, 1988: 1522.
22 Scarcia, 1979; Comparetti, 2004: 208-209 (with bibliography). Heracles appears in a Dionysian procession in two Sasanian silver plates kept in the Freer Gallery of Art and in the Moscow Historical Museum: Ettinghausen, 1972: pl. fig. 10; Shepherd, 1980: fig. 20; Gunter, Jett, 1992: pl. 14. Another silver plate kept in the British Museum and indicated as dating to the Parthian period is embellished with the same Dionysian scene. Most likely also this plate should be considered chronologically later: Dalton, 1964: 49-51, pl. 196; Ward, 1993: 44. A last Sasanian silver plate embellished with the gilded figure of Heracles in the act of bringing the boar to Eurystheus has been published in Ortiz, 1994: cat. 243. In all the just mentioned metalworks there is no clear link either to Mazdean divinities or to Mazdean sphere.
23 For a similar decoration in a Sasanian stucco from Nezāmābād (Iran) see: Kröger, 1982: fig. 94, cat. 257.
identified according to the Mazdean pantheon. A very similar cloak can be observed as worn by Ahurā Mazdā in at least four rock reliefs, specifically at Naqš-e Rağāb III, Naqš-e Rostam I, Tāq-e Bostān I and (above all) III. However, at Naqš-e Rağāb IV and Bishāpur V the chest of Ahurā Mazdā is covered by one of his arm, at Firuzābād II the garments are just sketched while Bishāpur I is almost entirely destroyed so it is not possible to say if the god had a cloak. According to such an observation, it could be cautiously considered that this kind of cloak was among the distinguishing traits proper of Ahurā Mazdā in Sasanian art exactly as the crenellated crown and the beard. In this way, the divinities of figs. 10 and 14 would be the best candidate for such an identification although it is not possible to say much about the ones in figs. 15 and 17, especially as regarding the presence of the beard. Of course this is just an hypothesis which must be considered very cautiously since also some rock images of the šāhanšāh present a very similar cloak.

Among the group of three figural capitals originally from Biston, H. von Gall had noted another divinity wearing a chain-armor who also presents the same enigmatic spherical-like objects on his shoulders. As for the other monuments of this kind, the face has been deleted (probably on purpose), so it is difficult to say whether the figure is a male or a female one (fig. 12). The armor fits better with a male god, even if the few traces of it can be observed only covering part of the bust and not the whole of the body as in the capital with Verethragna. The second capital of this same group presents another divinity who could be identify with Anāhītā (fig. 13). According to von Gall, some details of the decoration of the garments of the goddess recur almost identical in this capital and in the rock relief of the bigger grotto at Tāq-e Bostān. In fact, the rosette on her shoulder in the relief and the numerous ones on the cloak in the capital could be considered a hint to the search of the artist for the same iconography.

25 Von Gall, 1990.a: pl. I.
26 The meaning of these objects is not clear but probably they were not a prerogative of divinities since they seem to have appeared on the shoulders of a king in a Sasanian rock relief at Ray now destroyed: Herzfeld, 1938: fig. 18; Von Gall, 1990.b: fig. 5, pl. 14. They appear also on the shoulders of Šapur I in the well-known cameo kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris: Ghirshman, 1982: fig. 192.
27 Von Gall, 1990.a: 100. See also: Fukai, Horiuchi, 1972: pls. XXI-XXIII, XXVII. Exactly as for the crowns of the king in the capital and in
There is then a series of small arches on the higher rim of the capital but it is not clear if this detail could refer to Anāhītā. Another observation could be added: the way of wearing the cloak is identical in both monuments although, in the relief in the grotto, Anāhītā has the right shoulder covered, while in the capital it is the left one.\(^{28}\) In the latter monument an element appears below the ribbon on the left side of the goddess, probably a flower or another vegetal decoration coming from the other side of the capital with vegetal decoration. The third figural capital of the Bisotun group probably presents another divinity whose identity is once more enigmatic (fig. 14). As in the other capital with Anāhītā just considered, also this divinity presents a round-shaped vegetal element on the left side. This is probably an astronomic-astrological symbol which can be seen quite often on other capitals, but together with the king. The figure of the monarch is sometimes represented between the two round floral elements (a possible call to the sun and the moon) as in the capitals of figures 10-11, 14, 18. A specimen of this typology is now kept in the Irān-e bastān Museum; in fact, on one side there is a king between two circular flowers while, on the opposite side, there is the reproduction of a divinity that has almost disappeared (fig. 15).\(^{29}\) In some other case (as in the capitals of figures 5, 8, 12-13), the vegetal elements are blossoms coming from the other sides of the capital with vegetal decorations. Once more, it is not clear if there is any connection between the vegetal roundel and the god.

Two last figural capitals displayed at Tāq-e Bostān are worth mentioning in this paper since they have not appeared, to this writer’s knowledge, in any report before. The first is a capital with vegetal decoration constituted by a central plant coming out from a vase (clearly borrowing from classical art) and vegetal...
scrolls on all four sides. For this reason it is very difficult to say whether it belongs to the same group of the other figural capitals (fig. 16). There are also traces of recent restoration on it. The second capital presents a divinity almost disappeared on one side (fig. 17) and on the opposite one just traces of the king which was completely deleted on purpose (fig. 18). In fact, whosoever destroyed the king tried to reproduce (quite crudely) also on this side the same vegetal decoration present on the other two sides but left traces of the two circular vegetal-astronomical elements and of the ribbons at the base of the bust of the king. By the observation of such details, it clearly appears that also this king was represented frontally and, possibly, with a nimbus behind his head as in the other capitals.

It has been argued that frontal representation was used in Sasanian art for heroes of the past and divinities exactly such as the nimbus behind the head. For such reasons, a clear identification of the kings in the capitals under examination becomes even more complicated. The comparison with the reliefs in the bigger grotto at Taq-e Bostan still constitutes one of the few useful specimens of (late) Sasanian art. However, it is important to remind once more the fact that Taq-e Bostan (where many external influences converged – especially from Byzantium) is a monument not responding to typical formulae of Sasanian art. A textile fragment kept in the Benaki Museum (Athens) represents the only other term of comparison (fig. 19). In this woolen and linen fragment said to have been acquired in Egypt, it is, in fact, possible to discern a central figure probably on horseback, bigger in size than the other attendants around him, and wearing a garment typical of Sasanian kings, which is embellished with the drop-like motifs seen on the clothes of Khosrow II at Taq-e Bostan and on the clothes of the enigmatic king in the figural capitals. Just for such a detail, the main figure could be considered a sovereign and not a deity. Moreover, on the shoulders of the embroidered central figure there are traces of two spherical objects embellished with smaller bright discs, possibly, to be identified with the round objects on the shoulders of the

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30 A picture of this capital has been published (together with the capital in fig. 14 of the present article), without any specific comment, in: Matheson, 2000: fig. 34.
33 On this decoration see: Domyo, 1984: fig. 19.
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divinities wearing a chain amour in two capitals at Tāq-e Bostān. Unfortunately, also the «Benaki textile» was not found during scientific excavations and it is not easy to establish a definitive chronology for it, although the observation of other details (as the style of the spread wings on the pedestal of the pole with a «doubled» eight-pointed star behind the central king) could suggest to date this piece to the late Sasanian period. Its pictorial character points to its probable use as a tapestry. 34

2. Specimens of Sasanian painting

The recent discovery of important Sasanian mural paintings at Gor (Fārs) and their first analysis by the distinguished archaeologist D. Huff caused great sensation among students of pre-Islamic Iranian art. Sasanian paintings, in fact, are only slightly investigated since the recovery of very fragmentary specimens. A new aspect of Sasanian history of art will probably start after the publication of the mural paintings at Gor (at present just partially known through some undistinguished pictures in the Internet) 35 although some words can be said here on pre-Islamic paintings in general.

The artistic production under the Sasanians does not represent at all a precise break with the preceding period. As it has been observed in the last twenty years of intense research, some iconographic formulae considered to be characteristic of Sasanian art revealed themselves to have been actually codified in a more ancient period. 36 This is particularly clear for the specimens of Parthian painting and graffiti discovered at Hatra and published almost completely quite recently. 37 The concept is also clearly expressed in the only articulated study on Sasanian painting already published. 38

34 Comparetti, 2005; Comparetti, forthcoming a.
35 http://www.chn.ir/news/?section=2&i=29609 (I owe to the kindness of Turağ Daryā’i this web page). The site was visited unofficially by Dr. Stefano Pellò in 2005.
36 Scarcia, 2004: 87, 106. See also a curious article where the very existence of a Sasanian art is even denied: Lozinski, 1995: 141-142.
38 De Waele, 2004: 374-375. Most likely, the paintings to be attributed to the Sasanian period are less numerous than the ones enlisted by De Waele. See, in fact: Gasche, 2002: 187.
Among the pictorial graffiti dated to the Parthian period found at Lākh Mazār (around Birgand, Khorāsān Province), there is a very interesting one accompanied by an inscription. It is possibly to recognize a diademed bearded man fighting barehanded against a leaping lion. 39 The scene is represented completely in profile and with great dynamic, even though the figure of the lion seems to be a codified one exactly as it appears in many Sasanian metalworks. A second graffito, to be probably dated to the Sasanian period, shows the figure of another leaping lion represented more realistically and with the typical roundels on the joints of the legs. 40

The only pictorial cycle dated to the Sasanian period (possibly to the 4th-5th century) preserved in a state not too fragmentary has been discovered at Ḥāḡiābād in Fārs Province. 41 The two male busts comprised inside roundels and considered to have been royal portraits present the peculiarity of open wide eyes as for the human figures in the Benaki Museum pictorial textile fragment (fig. 19).

This way of representing the eyes seems to be characteristic of Sasanian art and it could be compared also to a painting recovered at Paykand probably representing a religious scene (fig. 20). 42 The city of Paykand, as the whole Bukhara Oasis, has been under Sasanian jurisdiction for some period and there the influence of Persia was probably deeper than in other parts of Sogdiana. However, in the Paykand Museum some other fragmentary paintings belonging to a completely different typology can be seen. One in particular (observed directly by the present writer during a visit to the museum in October 2003) 43 displays the eye of a person according to a different style which could be defined «pure Sogdian» after comparison with other specimens from Varakhsha, Afrāsyāb and, above all, Panğaqand (fig. 21).

The chronology of the two fragments has been established quite precisely on an archaeological basis: for the painting executed according to the «Persian» style, 6th century was argued,

40 Khaniki, Kanzaq, 1994: fig. at p. 47. D2; Yamauchi, 1996: 6.3.4.
42 Semenov, 2001: 35; Semenov, Adylova, 2006: 140, fig. 2b.
43 I owe the possibility to visit the museum in Paykand to Dr. G.L. Semenov whom I wish to thank here. Another member of the Russian archaeological mission at Paykand, Asan Torgoev, was so kind to discuss with me some details of these fragmentary paintings.
while the fragment with the «Sogdian» style eye was most likely painted during the 8th century. So, the existence of two painting schools at Paykand could be considered correct only on chronological basis and because of the tangible presence of Sasanian Persia in western Sogdiana until the coming of the Arabs.

3. The silver-gilt plate kept in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek

A curious metalwork embellished with an unusual representation of a so-called «Senmurv» is at present part of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen. The silver-gilt dish is described as Sasanian (possibly dated around 500) in a rare old Italian publication 44 even if the well-known Russian specialist B. I. Maršak expressed himself cautiously as regarding such a precise identification. In a personal communication, he also did not exclude that the metalwork could be a forgery. The composite monster of this plate has the body of a bird and the paws of a big feline (fig. 22). The feathers on the body could also be interpreted as fish scales and, in fact, they are quite different than the style of the part of the wing attached to the rest of the body. The head of the creature is also unusual since the «Senmurv» normally presents a dog-like head, while in this case it resembles a parrot with a round eye and open mouth with its tongue coming out. The common identification of the monster just described with the Senmurv (or, in Neopersian, Simorgh) of Iranian myths has been seriously criticized by scholars like A. Bausani and B. Maršak. 45 For this reason the name Senmurv should be used cautiously.

Independently from the identification of the winged monster in the plate of the Ny Carlsberg Gliptotek, there is at least another specimen of a similar monster in a silver plate kept in the Reżā ‘Abbāsi Museum in Tehran. The execution of this second winged creature is definitely depicted in a crude way and many details seem to have been reproduced on the base of an established model. The main differences are given by the feathers, which are remarkably curly and by the crest on the head of the monster (fig. 23). Also the paws and the hart-like roundel frame are

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44 Capolavori nei secoli, 1962: 199. The publication is part of a popular encyclopædia but it is the only one at this writer’s knowledge.
all hints to an inaccurate work, which points out to a possible modern forgery.

At the site of the Quri Qal'e cave (Kermānšāh) eight silver plates have been recently recovered. Seven of them are embellished with animal or monster figures and one presents even a Pahlavi inscription. For this study the most interesting plate is the one embellished with the figure of a parrot-like monster of the kind just considered (fig. 24). This creature resembles the «Senmurv» of the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek and the Reżā ‘Abbāsi Museum especially for the reproduction of its mouth vaguely resembling the beak of a bird. However, several details appear completely different and, also stylistically, it points to a possible date to the Islamic period although the chronology to the 7th century (late Sasanian) ⁴⁶ has already been proposed.

Rudy Favaro

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON AN ILKHANID MONUMENT

Whereas the archaeological activity of pre-Islamic Iranian monuments and sites is today re-evaluated throughout the country, it is worth noting a true revival of the interest for works of art (concerning discovery, inventory, and restoration, unfortunately not always conservative) not only dated to classical Islamic but also involving Qāğār and early Pahlavi periods. For this reason our Institute, which already has a conspicuous photo archive about Persian monuments of the ’50-’60ies of the 20th century, dedicated much time of the mission to visit several famous buildings whose present conditions, during and after restorations, can be compared to the ones of some years ago.

An inspection at Ezirān village, 28,5 km southeast of Isfahan (in Wilber «some 32 kilometers», due to the bad conditions of the roads in his times), in the south of the Zāyande-rud, shows at present the re-arrangement of a place with several ancient

buildings, in the meydān dedicated to XXV Khordād, about 200 m. on the right (south) of a modern road. This inspection found its motivation in comparing the condition and the shape of the mosque there – which have been studied for the first time by Wilber (Cat. N. 71), and called by him fair (even if «part of the outer dome is destroyed. Less than half of the flanking corridors remain; entrance portal is partially destroyed. The forecourt no longer exists. The mihrab is missing at the wall broken throughout» Wilber p. 166) – with the present ones. In fact, in 2002 the mosque was considered to be in a bad state of neglect notwithstanding a recent restoration which has been called good (Ṣāyeste 2003 p. 144-145). Such conditions are testified by a reproduction where at least the external part of the building seems completely changed in comparison to the observation by Wilber. Between Wilber’s report time and modern times, the mosque was described as seriously ruined (Rafi’i Mehrābādī 1352/1973-74, p. 822), while a few restorations have been held inside the dome. But our attention has been especially attracted by the contiguous, and not usually reported, «emāmzāde» of ‘Ali b. Musā al-Kāzēm (figs. 25-29). Such attribution is clarified, today, by an authoritative statement dated 21st Moharram 1425, corresponding to 23rd Esfand 1382 (that is to say, exactly one year after the last report about the mosque in the guide of Isfahan mentioned above), signed by the Ḵoḡgaṭ al-eslām wa al-moslemin Ḥājj Seyyk ‘Ali Falsafi (Loṭfizāde) active in Mashhad, but «going to eternity» (mowred-e ta’bid) exactly the next day. This is what is said by the seyyed Ṭāleb al-Ḥaqq, who can show a photocopy of such a document to anyone who explicitly asks for it. The document starts with a celebration of the past glories of Isfahan and refers to a legendary visit of Abraham at the site, to a better known legend about the flight of Solomon there together with his minister Āsaf (it is a kind of «copy» of the story of draining and improving a swampy land normally attributed to Sistan), and to a pilgrim presence: the one (after Hoseyn himself) of a certain (but ‘alayhi al-salām) ‘Ali b. Musā al-Kāzēm. A courageous identification with the eighth imam is suggested for the latter person in not-explicit way. Anyway, such an identification would make of that place a «transit», a qadamgāb, similar to the famous and definitely official one at Nišāpur. The document mentions also an archive containing several lists of the goods belonging to the owqāf.

We could say that the structure of the emāmzāde, whoever is his «inhabitant», is much more interesting than the quite normal
one of the mosque. As regards a possible datation,\footnote{Kleiss, 1972: 221, «…ein wohl safavidisches… Imamzadeh»} we have no doubt several «late» examples of frames \textit{a risega}, accomplishing the function both of «Trompenkonstruktion» (moqarnas) and decorative niches: see the structure named after Bahā al-din Ḥeydar in Zavāre (fig. 30), and the niche in the courtyard of the seljuq-safavid Masğed-e Jāme‘ in Savage (fig. 31). However these features go back as far as the Madrase-ye Heydariye of Qazwin (fig. 32). Not less archaic is the «Ilkhanid flavour» of the dome, with its radial ribbings.

The measures of the building are: side 9,80 mt. × 9,80 mt. (external) and 6,15 mt. × 6,15 mt. (internal). The dome is 2,60 mt. high and its diameter is 5,20 mt. The whole of the monument is 6,30 mt. high.

Waiting for more accurate researches, at the present moment our goal is just to introduce a preliminary report supported by unpublished images which have increased our archive.

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Fig. 1. Figural capital from Qal'e-ye Kohne. Found in 1964 (very fragmentary). (Photo: Rudy Favaro).

Fig. 2. Figural capital from Venderni. Found in 1968 (dimensions: h. 60 cm, l. 68,5 cm, w. 68,5 cm). (Photo: Rudy Favaro).
Fig. 3. Undecorated capital said to be from the Cathedral Mosque, Kermānšāh (dimensions: h. 69 cm, l. 75 cm, w. 75 cm). (Photo: Rudy Favaro).

Fig. 4. Figural capital from the foundations of the Cathedral Mosque, Kermānšāh. Found in 1993 (dimensions: h. 66 cm, l. 72.5 cm, w. 74 cm). According to the plate on the pedestal at Ţāq-e Bostān the god on this capital is Bahrām. (Photo: Rudy Favaro).
Fig. 5. Image of the king on the opposite side of Bahrām’s one. (Photo: Rudy Favaro).

Fig. 6. Detail of the image of Bahrām.
Fig. 7. The lower register of the bigger grotto at Taq-e Bostan.
(Photo: Rudy Favaro).

Fig. 8. Figural capital at Chehel Sotun Palace, Isfahan (dimensions: h. 75 cm, l. 75 cm, w. 75 cm). Image of Adhur or Xvarnah?
(Photo: Rudy Favaro).
Fig. 9. Representation of a divinity on Khosrow II’s reverse coins.  
(After Gyselen, 2000: fig. b.)

Fig. 10. Figural capital from Kermānšāh city center. Found in 1999 (dimensions: h. 66 cm, l. 72 cm, w. 71 cm). According to the plate on the pedestal at Taq-e Bostān the god on this capital is Bahram.  
(Photo: Rudy Favaro).
Fig. 11. Swastika-like decoration on two sides of the preceding capital. (Photo: Rudy Favaro).

Fig. 12. Figural capital originally from Bisotun. Found in 1840 (dimensions: h. 86 cm, l. 86 cm, w. 89 cm). According to the plate on the pedestal at Ṭaqq-e Bostān the god on this capital is Bahrām. (Photo: Rudy Favaro).
Fig. 13. Figural capital originally from Bisotun. Found in 1840. (dimensions: h. 89 cm, l. 87,5 cm, w. 89 cm). According to the plate on the pedestal at Ṭaq-e Bostân the goddess on this capital is Anâhitâ. (Photo: Rudy Favaro).

Fig. 14. Figural capital originally from Bisotun. Found in 1840. (dimensions: h. 87 cm, l. 89 cm, w. 88,5). According to the plate on the pedestal at Ṭaq-e Bostân the god on this capital is Āhurā Mazdā. (Photo: Rudy Favaro).
Fig. 15. Figural capital kept in the Irān-e bāstān Museum (dimensions: h. 75 cm, l. 75 cm, w. 75 cm). Image of an unidentified divinity. (Photo: Rudy Favaro).

Fig. 16. Figural capital from the Cathedral Mosque, Kermānšāh (dimensions: h. 66 cm, l. 66,5, w. 65,5 cm). Vegetal decoration. (Photo: Rudy Favaro).
Fig. 17. Figural capital from the Cathedral Mosque, Kermānšāh (dimensions: h. 67 cm, l. 73 cm, w. 73 cm). According to the plate on the pedestal at Ṭāq-e Bostān the god on this capital is Bahram.
(Photo: Rudy Favaro).

Fig. 18. Traces of the image of the king on the opposite side of the preceding one.
(Photo: Rudy Favaro).
Fig. 19. Textile 7001, the Benaki Museum, Athens (dimensions: h. 38 cm, l. 39.5 cm).
(Photograph: Courtesy Roberta Cortopassi).

Fig. 20. Sogdian painting from Paykand (Uzbekistan), 6th century.
(Reconstruction: M. Compareti after Semenov, 2001: 35).
Fig. 21. Sogdian painting from Paykand, 8th century.
(Author’s sketch.)

Fig. 22. Sasanian silver-gilt dish.
(Courtesy: Ny Carlsberg Glyptoteket, Copenhagen.)

Fig. 23. Detail of a silver dish kept in the Re ž ā ’Abbāsi Museum, Tehran.
(Photo: Rudy Favaro).

Fig. 24. Silver plate found in the Quri Qal’e cave (Kermānšāh).
(Author’s sketch after: Rahimi, 2004: pl. 303.)
Fig. 25. Emāmzāde of ‘Ali b. Musā al-Kāẓem, Ezirān village (Isfahan). (Photo: Rudy Favaro).

Fig. 26. View of the monuments at Ezirān village. (Photo: Rudy Favaro).
Fig. 27. Internal view of the emāmzāde of ‘Ali b. Musā al-Kāẓem.
(Photo: Rudy Favaro).
Fig. 28. Detail of the dome of the emāmzāde.
(Photo: Rudy Favaro).
Fig. 29. Detail of one of the splays of the emāmzāde.
(Photo: Rudy Favaro).

Fig. 30. Detail of the structure named after Bahā al-din Ḥeydar (Zavāre).
(Photo: Rudy Favaro).
Fig. 31. Niche in the courtyard of the Masğed-e Jāme‘ in Sāve.
(Photo: Rudy Favaro).
Fig. 32. Detail of the internal decoration of the Madrase-ye Ḥeydariye (Qazwin).
(Photo: Rudy Favaro).