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The bow as an insignia of power in the art of ancient Iran

<https://doi.org/10.34739/his.2021.10.06>

Abstract: *This article presents the iconographic concept of the bow as an insignia in ancient Iran of the imperial era. The primary source of the bow's association with the depiction of royal power is Mesopotamian iconography, where the bow is shown in the hands of kings without any connection to the act of shooting itself. The model of depicting a ruler with a bow resting on his foot, developed in the Neo-Assyrian period, was entirely adopted by imperial Achaemenid iconography. Another aspect expressing the association of the bow with royal power is the habit of depicting, in the Mesopotamian tradition, shooting kings without quivers. Iranian art of the Parthian and Sasanid periods, on the other hand, adopted the quiver as a sign of status from the nomadic steppe tradition, but one can nevertheless see in Sasanid iconography relics of the functioning of the bow as an insignia in the Mesopotamian sense.*

Key words: Ancient Iranian art; Iranian royal insignia; Bows; Mesopotamian iconography; Iranian kingship

Western literature has repeatedly stressed the important role of the bow for the armed forces of Iran. The bow was a weapon with a strong symbolic or even religious charge. Proficiency in archery was one of the arts characterising the ruler but also the ideal courtier, carefully cultivated among the youth. We find the bow in legends about the origins of the Scythians passed down by Herodotus, where it appears in a strong connection with the idea of royal power. This testifies to the archaic semantic contexts in which the bow appears in Iranian ideology. It also needs to be remembered that Persian art developed in dependence on Mesopotamian sources, and Mesopotamian ideas influenced the formation of the Iranian worldview.

The symbolic function of the bow is reflected in iconography. The ubiquity of the use of bows as weapons requires caution when considering the semantics of depictions. It is clear that in a society where the art of shooting was a male prerogative, the ruler, as 'the best of men' was naturally shown as 'the best of archers'. However, it is difficult to say whether, in the case of depictions of kings shooting with bows, the weapon refers to skill or status. A weapon shown in use is potentially just a weapon, and only when deprived of the context of battle does it become a sign, a symbol or, in the case of representations of rulers, an insignia. Naturally, numerous

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Sasanian depictions of rulers during their struggle with beasts or while chasing the fleeing game are not 'realistic' in character. It is difficult to presume that rulers, even Sasanian rulers, hunted with crowns on their heads and court paraphernalia, but even in those situations, where the kings' robes would justify considering the other accompanying objects as part of the insignia of power, the weaponry is part of the 'act of hunting' rather than an 'attribute of power'. An object involved in the action may remain an attribute (Apollo, or Artemis, shooting from a bow are distinguished from an ephebe or a girl precisely by the use of an attribute in the action, similarly the representation of the resting Herakles acquires content through a lion's skin, a mace and a quiver) but in the absence of a clear literary context, caution dictates that objects appearing in the immediate action be treated as related to the action itself. Naturally, such a method significantly limits the set of artefacts to be analysed, but it prevents accusations of piling up meanings not planted in the proper historical context. Therefore, images in which a ruler holds a bow, but does not shoot it, will be considered to represent the bow as an insignia. Such representations, although less frequent, do not raise doubts as to their semantic content.

In the analysis there will appear, on a comparative basis, representations of rulers shooting, illustrating the idea that the act of using a bow was still within the royal decorum, while carrying arrows was not.

On the Naramsin's stele found in Susa [Fig. 1],¹ the high military significance of archery is clearly emphasised. The monument is not of Iranian heritage, it was created as a commemoration of the victory of an Akkadian ruler, looted by the Elamites, the only direct connection with Iran is that the site of the find is located within the later Greater Iran. Yet it should be noted that this stele illustrates themes later found in Persian art. Some of the victorious warriors depicted on the stele, including Naramsin himself, hold bows in their hands, and enemies are shown hit by arrows. It is noteworthy that the king is shown with a bow in his bent left hand, which is also holding a battle-axe, while in his right hand he holds an arrow. From a practical point of view, Naramsin cannot use any of the weapons he carries. He is clad with them, thus visually demonstrating his relationship to both axe and missile weapons. The king possesses all the weapons that become his attributes. The soldiers accompanying him carry battle maces, spears, and one also holds a bow himself in a gesture similar to that of the king with his left hand turned back towards the middle of his body, but he has no axe and instead of an arrow in his hand, he carries a quiver on his shoulder. The depiction of Naramsin, therefore, seems to be the first one where small arms were shown as a symbol of power. It seems that the combination of a combat chequebook with a bow and arrow is a complex of weapons iconographically linked with a leadership function.

¹ GORELIK, 2003: 266-267, tab. XLI, FARROKH, 2007: 26.

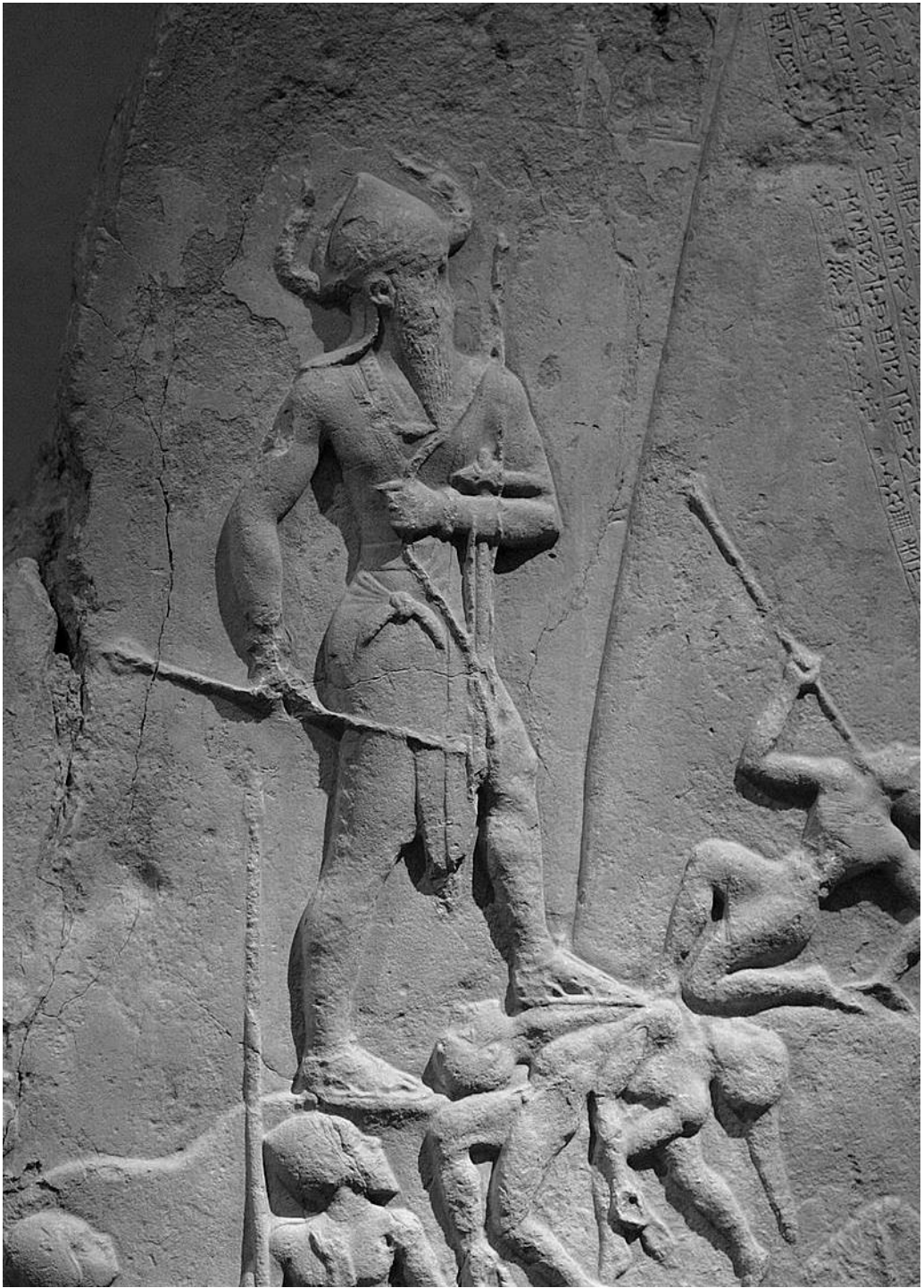


Fig. 1. Victory Stele of Naram-Sin (detail), Department of Near Eastern Antiquities of the Louvre; after HARPER, ARUZ, TALLON, 1992: 168.

A similar pattern can be observed in the case of the relief of King Lulubi Anubanini on the relief Sar-e Pol-e Zohab II [Fig. 2].² Like Naramsin, the ruler holds a bow and arrow and an axe, crushing with his foot the body of the slain enemy, but, like Naramsin, he has no quiver. Naturally, the reliefs differ from one another. Lulubi Anubanini holds both a bow and an arrow in his bent left hand and the axe, lowered, in his right, differs in type from the weapon wielded by Naramsin, but the composition of the royal armament complex remains identical. The symbolic character is also emphasised by the scene itself, detached from the battlefield, the opponents depicted have already been bound, captured, enslaved (except for one, whose body is trampled by the victorious ruler) and the king himself is in contact with Innana herself, so there can be no question of using the weapon held, which has a primarily semantic value.

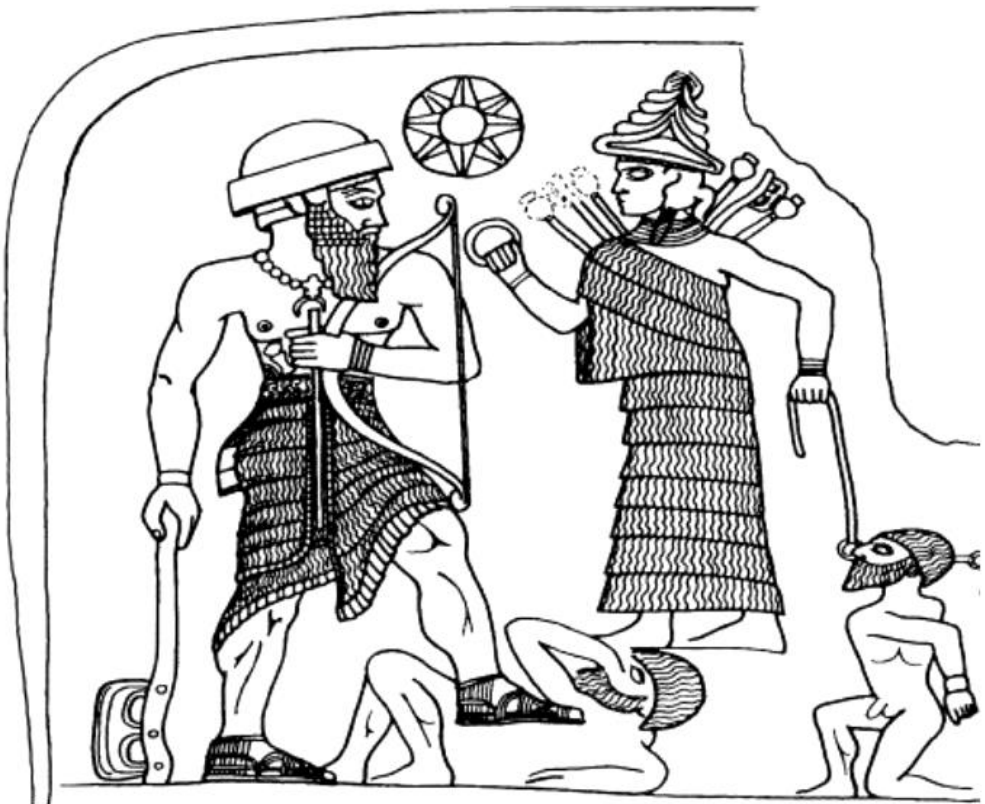


Fig. 2. Relief Anubanini Sar-e Pol-e Zohab, province of Kurdistan, Iran; after VANDEN BERGHE, 1983: fig 1.

The relief at Darband-i-Gawr [Fig. 3], attributed to Naramsin, is linked to the monuments discussed above by the position of the victorious figure, holding a bow in his bent left hand and a battle axe in his right, the figure treads on the bodies of defeated enemies shown on a smaller scale. Apart from the similarity of the king's

² KAIM, 1996: 117-118, fig. 91; GORELIK, 2003: 266-267, tab. XLI.

position and the ensemble of his equipment, there is little evidence of identification with Naramsin. The headdress is different, the shape of the beard is different, the type of axe is different, the type of loin-cloth or kilt is different, the necklace is different, and the style of execution differs considerably – the victorious figure in relief from Darband-i-Gawr is more dynamic, appears to be climbing to a greater extent and the monument itself has been executed more graphically, losing the softness of treatment from Naramsin's stele. The very fact that the axe is held in the right hand brings the relief from Darband-i-Gawr closer to the representation from Sar-e Pol-e Zohab II. Similarly, the scale of the reduction of the defeated enemies brings the two reliefs closer together, rendering them from Naramsin's stele. Also the headgear appears similar but different from the Naramsin stele. What brings Darband-i-Gawr closer to Naramsin's stele is the depiction of the bodies of the defeated scattered under the feet of the victor, in place of the rhythm of the bound captives.

The above three monuments, however, represent by far the same type of violent triumph, in which weapons act as designations of power, insignia of authority rather than mere instruments of killing. The victorious rulers present their bows, symbolising their combat prowess. The power-related symbolism of the battle axe among the Iranian speaking nations has been sufficiently arguments by Nikonorov,³ however the origin of such symbolism might relate Mesopotamia.

The bow and arrows in Assyrian iconography seem to carry a similar quasi-insignia function, the king holding them while seated on a throne as in the relief of Sennacherib of Nineveh, now in the British Museum [Fig. 4],⁴ or in scenes between the king and courtiers, as in the Tiglath-Pilaser III relief at the Detroit Institute of Arts,⁵ on a glazed terracotta tile from the palace at Nimrud, now in the British Museum,⁶ or libations made by Ashurnasirpal II [Fig. 5], after hunting lions, shown on reliefs from Nimrud and Nineveh in the British Museum.⁷ In each case the king holds a bow, sometimes alone, sometimes also holding an arrow, or several arrows, but the quiver itself is always carried by an accompanying courtier. In the case of Naramsin or Anubanini even such an accompaniment is absent, the kings themselves wield a single arrow and have no quiver, and the scene does not depict hunting but battle or post-battle triumphs, so it is necessary to consider the above observation as a working hypothesis, but it seems indisputable that while the bow and arrows had a strong message associated with power and military strength, the quiver was a case devoid of visible splendour.

³ NIKONOROV, 2014a; 2014b; 2015.

⁴ BRERETON, 2018: 12, fig. 2 (cat. 1856.0909.14).

⁵ POISEL, 2009: 110-112 (cat. 50.32).

⁶ COLLINS, 2018: 39, fig. 35.

⁷ READE, 2018: 59, fig 64, 60-62, fig. 65-66.



Fig. 3. Rock Relief at Darband-i-Gawr, Qaradagh Mountain, Sulaymaniyah, Iraq; after AMIN, 2016.



Fig. 4. Relief from the South-West Palace of Sennacherib in Nineveh (detail), British Museum inv. no. 124911, © The Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 5. Ashurnasirpal of Nimrud (detail), British Museum inv. no. 124533, © The Trustees of the British Museum

Numerous Assyrian representations show rulers shooting, but they never carry their quivers themselves; in the case of scenes where the bow appears only as an attribute associated with the ruler it may be complemented by a single arrow. However, on the semantic level one can notice a continuation of the tradition known from the Naramsin stele and the reliefs Sar-e Pol-e Zohab II and Darband-i-Gawr, although the Assyrian kings do not hold their bows in their bent left hand on their chest, but let them rest on an extended foot, the message remains identical – power is connected with the bow.

The continuation of Assyrian practice can be seen in the relief from the tomb of Darius the Great, Naqsh-e Rostam,⁸ and at the relief in Behistun [Fig. 6],⁹ where the ruler holds a bow, but no quiver or arrows. In both cases the Assyrian model is repeated, the king resting his bow on an extended foot, but in both situations the cultic nature of the imagery is clear. At Naqsh-e Rostam the king faces an altar in front of which flies the figure of a deity in a winged disk, while at Behistun he dominates a procession of captives, but turns to face the same deity in a winged disk above them. This depiction seems to relate to the visual model in Sar-e Pol-e Zohab II, where the king is accompanied by rows of captives, while he himself turns towards the deity. The impression of a connection with the transmission of art from the distant past is reinforced by the depiction of Darius, on a relief from Behistun, crushing the dead body of an enemy with one leg.

⁸ GHIRSHMAN, 1964: 230-232, fig. 280; BITTNER, 1987: 62-67; KAIM, 1996: 143-145, il. 108; GARRISON, 2013: 580-581.

⁹ GHIRSHMAN, 1964: 234-236, fig. 283; BITNER, 1985: 62-67; BOARDMAN, 2000: 106-107, il. 3.27 a,b, 3.28 a,b; KAIM, 1996: 114-118, il. 89-90; FARROKH, 2007: 53; GARRISON, 2013: 580-581.

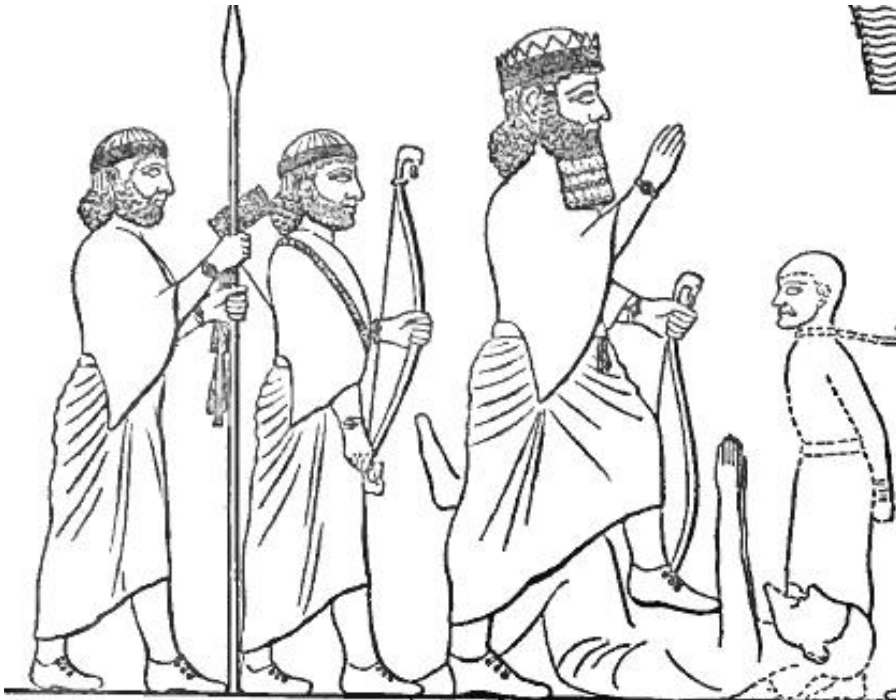


Fig. 6. Darius the Great of Behistun, Iran (detail); after KING, THOMPSON, 1907: pl. XIII.

The representation of the figures on the façade of the tomb in Kizkapan [Fig. 7],¹⁰ although shown with bows of a different type – with a double reflection, what indicates the connection of the visual, or semantic, Mesopotamian tradition with the ‘steppe-Scythian’ one – essentially repeats the model in the image of Darius of Naqsh-e Rostam, where he turns towards the altar.

It was noted above that the art of pre-Achaemenid Iran and Mesopotamia avoided concealing rulers carrying quivers. The archer on the cup from Amlash,¹¹ like the archers on the bowl from the Chamzi Mumah¹² are depicted shooting, but without quivers. Perhaps this reflects a practice known from later depictions of Assyrian royal hunting, where arrows for the king were carried by assisting courtiers and only warriors of lower rank were forced to carry their own ammunition.¹³ Similarly, a bronze figure of an archer from the Kalmakareh cave in Lurestan shows a deep relationship with Assyria, but where unfortunately no quiver is depicted.¹⁴ In both cases the connection to Assyrian iconography is obvious, although somehow artistically distant from the imperial art of Assyria.

¹⁰ GHIRSHMAN, 1964: 87-88, fig. 115-116.

¹¹ GHIRSHMAN, 1964: 34, fig. 38.

¹² KAIM, 1996: 79, 81, il. 66.

¹³ BRERETON, 2018: 11, fig. 1; COLLINS, 2018: 39, fig. 35; READE, 2018: 52-53, fig. 57, 60-61, fig. 65, 72-73, fig. 78, fig. 80.

¹⁴ KHOSRAVI, 2013.

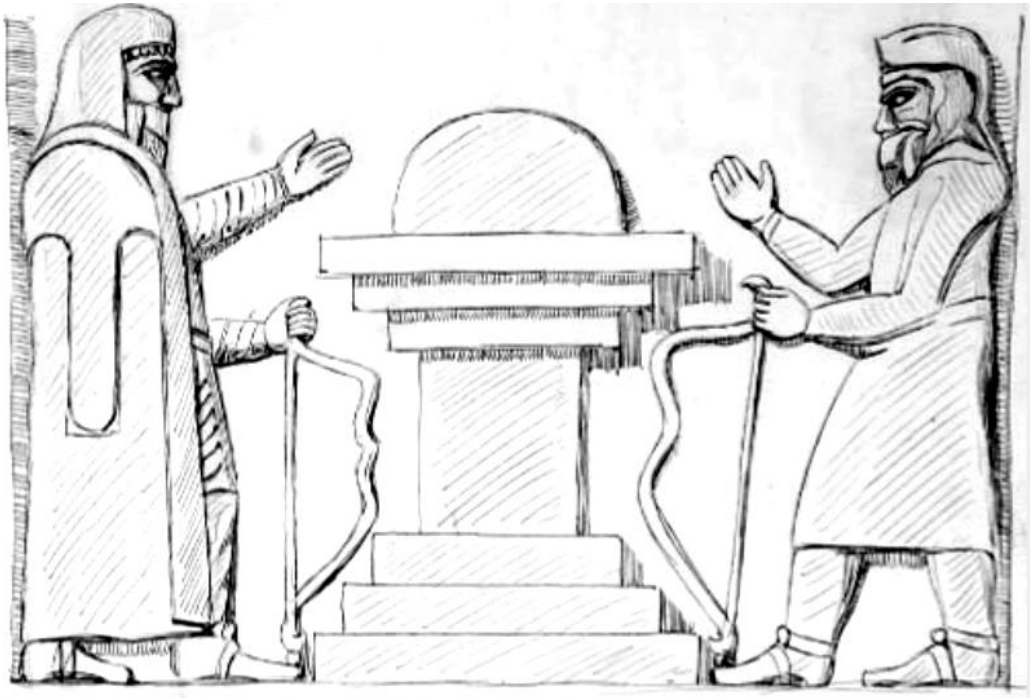


Fig. 7. Façade of the tomb in Kizkapan (detail); after EDULJEE, 2013: 19.

Although quivers were not equipment worthy of being worn by rulers, they were sometimes richly decorated, as evidenced by the above-mentioned iconography, which is not surprising in cases of the armament of members of the court, but decorations can also be seen on quivers worn by simple soldiers and abandoned on battlefields as in the relief of the battle of Til-Tuba.¹⁵ Bronze quivers are known from the Urartian tradition, and more than sixty have survived.¹⁶ In Iran, bronze decorative fittings of pre-Achaemenid quivers, probably of a similar type but decorated in a different style, come mainly from Luristan, over forty examples are known.¹⁷ It is possible that the rosettes on the Luristan bronze quiver from War Kabud betray an affinity with the Elamite quivers depicted in the scene of the battle of Til-Tuba, including that worn by the Elamite heir to the throne,¹⁸ and with the quiver carried behind Ashurbanipal in his relief with hunting scenes,¹⁹ while the king himself carries an unused bow slung over his shoulder. Similarly, a rosette, partially obscured by the hand of a courtier, can be seen on the above-mentioned terracotta tile from Nimrud.²⁰ The use of a similar decorative motif may have resulted from

¹⁵ NADALI, 2018: 237-240, fig. 252-254.

¹⁶ DEZSÖ, NIEDERREITER, BODNÁR, 2021: 137-147; ZIMANSKY, 2018: 163, fig. 178, History Museum of Armenia, Yerevan, nr. Kat. 2303-7.

¹⁷ DEZSÖ, NIEDERREITER, BODNÁR, 2021: 147-159; GHIRSHMAN, 1964: 70, fig. 91, 337; KAIM, 1996: 78, 81, il. 65; GORELIK, 2003: 274-275.

¹⁸ NADALI, 2018: 236-240, fig. 252-254.

¹⁹ BRERETON, 2018: 11, fig. 1.

²⁰ COLLINS, 2018: 39, fig. 35.

the semantic function of the ornament. Four specimens of Assyrian bronze quivers have been physically preserved.²¹

The bow as a significant element, a means of semantic communication, can be found on Achaemenid *dareics*, where figures wearing a crown and ‘Persian’ or ‘court’ clothes, most probably adopted from the Elamite tradition,²² where such clothes would be associated with a sign of royal power,²³ are shown running, holding spears and bows. The position of both weapons indicates a strictly representative character, with the spear shown angled and the bow held in a slightly bent arm, without the arrow. Although there is no reference here to the immediate earlier visual tradition, the message seems identical to that of the previously mentioned monuments. It should be noted, however, that the figures on the coins, like representations of guardsmen in Elamite-Persian robes, usually have quivers on their backs, making them royal messengers or representatives rather than representations of the king himself.

The next Iranian dynasty to rule Iran, the Arsacids, were descended from the Saka *Aparni* tribe, part of the *Daha* confederacy. Since the Iranian reconquest began in the northern province of the former Achaemenid empire, *Parthava*, or Parthians, there was a widespread identification of the dynasty with its source, hence the interchangeable use of the term Parthian dynasty, or Parthians. The representatives of the dynasty themselves referred to themselves as *pehlevan* meaning heroes, mighty ones.

Gorytos, a combination of arrow case and bow, became a full-fledged symbol of power. They appear alone on the reverses of early Arsacid coins referring most likely to their military victories.²⁴ The construction of early Arsacid *gorytos* depicted in numismatics is difficult to reconstruct, it can be noted that the case takes the shape of the lower part of the bow, like the later steppe lances, but separate parts for arrows are not always visible. The art of Old Nisa comes to our rescue here, where *gorytos* can be found on terracotta reliefs of decorative architectural elements and remains of wall paintings.²⁵ A similar, although already weathered *gorytos* can be found on the relief depicting *Heracles* in *Bisutun*.²⁶ Early Parthian *gorytos* resembled Achaemenid ones, except for the covering of the protruding part of the bow (perhaps intentionally depicted uncovered because of the insignia significance of the bow), there were three or four, elongated ‘pockets’ for arrows running along the arrow case. It is presumed that the separated ‘rolls’ allowed the archer to choose arrows with the heads of particular characteristics, adapted to the current target. Naturally, the placement of arrows, even if identical, in ‘magazines’ allowed the archer to know at a glance the status of the ammunition, plus the limited space could prevent the arrows from clinking with the rays. These are important features when conducting rapid firing, which appears to have been a feature of Iranian warfare as early as the Parthian period.

It should be noted that in the case of the ‘archer’ motif on numerous Parthian coin series, it is difficult to identify elements of costume absent from the Achaemenid

²¹ DEZSÖ, NIEDERREITER, BODNÁR, 2021: 159-182.

²² ROES, 1951; GOLDMAN, 1964; BECK, 1972; BITTNER, 1987: 254-260; HEAD, 1992: 20-22; WOŹNIAK, 2010: 45; GARRISON, 2013: 576.

²³ CALMEYER, 1988; SEKUNDA, 1992: 3-4.

²⁴ GASLAIN, 2006: 236-248.

²⁵ PILIPKO, 2001: 229-230; PILIPKO, 2006: 268, 293; INVERNIZZI, 2011: 200-202.

²⁶ KAWAMI, 1987: 25-26.

period, and the arrangement of the figure itself is a copy of the Hellenistic motif depicting Apollo on omphalos, while referring to the coins of the satraps of the Achaemenid period.²⁷ Of course, the seated figure holding a bow can be described as an ‘archer’, but it is also noticeable that this bow is not shown in an act of shooting.²⁸ Rather, we have to suppose a continuation of the insignia function of the bow itself, which was presented above in the context of Achaemenid imagery, but which was also unfamiliar to steppe cultures. A man seated on an omphalos, or, later, on a throne, in the equivalent of Persian-‘Median’ costume, presents a double-reflex bow, which had been the shooting equipment of Persian warriors since the early Achaemenid period. Moreover, as in the Mesopotamian tradition, no gorytos is depicted, so the bow appears here in the function of a power designator rather than as a proper weapon in the context of combat or hunt. This phenomenon may indicate a continuation of Mesopotamian decorum in the case of figural representations, with, perhaps, a ‘portrait’ intention, but the placement of gorytos as independent symbols of power on the reverses of coins and metopes in a place as important as Stara Nisa (which is also a kind of declaration of power, or an appeal to apotropaic power) indicates an adaptation of the steppe semantics of gorytos, where it became a necessary marker of the status of the horse-archer.

Despite the dominance of gorytos in Parthian art, on the relief in Hung-i Yar Alivand, one can see, as it seems, traces of a quiver behind the right shoulder of the right figure,²⁹ which can be interpreted as a relic of an old tradition of archery on foot, or an iconographic model, probably connected with the model of the archer-goddess, be it Apollo or Artemis. A Bactrian, possibly Kushan medallion with an image of a female archer-goddess, now in the Hermitage collection, may serve as an analogy, where the deity, armed with a bow, reaches behind her shoulder with her right hand, as it seems, reaching for an arrow.³⁰ Naturally, it should be borne in mind that the relief in Hung-i Yar Alivand is very worn, and the projection behind the figure’s shoulder may be due to uneven treatment of the relief. Similarly, in the relief with the battle scene from Tang-e Sarvak,³¹ one of the pedestrian figures accompanying the heavy-armed horseman, placed in the upper left-hand corner of the representation, has a quiver behind his shoulder, although he is already shooting from a long ‘Hunnic’ bow. It is significant that the rider in the same depiction has a large integrated bow and arrow case attached to his belt on the right side. It seems that, in this case, we are dealing with an illustration of relics of earlier shooting methods, perhaps still used by infantry, rather than copying iconographic tradition. The Syrian archers on Trajan’s Column are shown wearing quivers behind their backs and carrying bows of the ‘Scythian’ type. Intriguingly, identical quivers seem to have been shown in the metopes of the column’s base among the armaments captured by the Romans. One can speculate whether they belong to Dacian or Parthian armament, in line with Pugachenkova’s thesis about Parthian, and not exclusively Dacian,

²⁷ CURTIS, 2007: 9; CURTIS, MAGUB, 2020: 13, 18-20.

²⁸ NIKITIN, 1998; WINKELMAN, 2006; CURTIS, 2007: 8-9, 12, 14, 17; ELLENBROCK, 2013: 255-261; CURTIS, MAGUB, 2020: 4, 7-8.

²⁹ KAWAMI, 1987: 126-128; MATHIESEN, 1992: 123-124.

³⁰ NIKONOROV, 1997: 14, 69, fig. 37 b.

³¹ KAWAMI, 1987: 201-204; 2013: 760; VON GALL, 1990: 13-19; MATHIESEN, 1992: 130-132; HAERINCK, 2005.

elements in the decoration of the column.³² The similarity with the quivers of Roman soldiers of Syrian origin, a country bordering Iran, further suggests a related origin. Why, however, the riders' gorytos would be missing among the spoils is difficult to explain.

The emergence of the elongated bow with rigid bone extensions, elongating the arms and thus increasing the weapon's strength considerably, should be linked to the expansion of the Xiong Nu,³³ although it should also be noted the specific time lag between the expansion itself and the widespread adaptation of the new type of bow throughout Eurasia, which testifies to a kind of conservatism in warriors and fighting techniques. It is also important to note the conventionality of the term. Although, in fact, the first bows with overlaps should be associated with the Xiong Nu, the identification of this ethnos with the later Huns is not fully clear. Perhaps the conversion of entire armies from a tactic of relatively close but dense firing to one of longer distance firing was so difficult that it did not immediately have the desired effect, and required top-down investment. Whatever the reason, the revolution that was the adoption of the 'Hunnic' type of bow is noticeable in Western Eurasia at the turn of the era, more often in the 1st-2nd century CE.³⁴

The change in the type of bow can also be seen in Parthian art, as evidenced by Elymida reliefs, such as the aforementioned Tang-e Sarvak,³⁵ a terracotta relief from the British Museum,³⁶ where the curious practice of placing a dagger, or short sword, on the surface of the gorytos, between the arrow tubes, is illustrated. An identical gorytos, comprising a case for a drawn bow and two arrow tubes, worn on the right side, is also shown in relief in Rag-e Bibi, a monument which is sometimes identified as Sasanian. However, attention should be paid to an arbitrarily expressed opinion, devoid of iconographic analysis, which raises doubts about a similar attribution, contradicting both reality and aesthetic principles.³⁷

During the Sasanian period, the bow did not lose its symbolic function, related to power. Among the numerous depictions of horseback riding, the king has a quiver with him. This is a rule from which only occasional exceptions appear. The bulky and long Sasanian quiver, with no room for a bow, seems to have gained in importance. It is possible that by avoiding depictions of integrated bow and arrow cases, the Sasanids intended to visually dissociate themselves from the previous dynasty. Of course, on the relief at Firuzbad [Fig. 8], both sides have the characteristic large quivers of the Sasanid type, which may mean that they appeared much earlier and by the third decade of the 3rd century CE, had definitely gone out of use in Iran. It may also be that such quivers were a status designator, by which Firuzbad indicates that the battle is between equal opponents.

³² PUGACHENKOWA, 1966.

³³ NIKONOROV, KHUDJAKOV, 2004: 45-69; GORONCHAROVSKY, 2006; VINOGRADOV, GORONCHAROVSKY, 2009: 189-193.

³⁴ MIELCZAREK, 1999: 44; VINOGRADOV, GORONCHAROVSKY, 2009: 190

³⁵ KAWAMI, 1987: 201-204; 2013: 760; VON GALL, 1990: 13-19; MATHIESEN, 1992: 130-132; HAERINCK, 2005.

³⁶ Nr inw. 135684; HERRMANN, 1989.

³⁷ MAKSYMCIUK, KUBIK, SKUPNIEWICZ, 2020.



Fig. 8. Relief at Firuzbad (detail), after VANDEN BERGHE, 1983: fig 9.

The display of the rulers' shooting equipment, regardless of the situation, definitely testifies to the symbolic function of bows and quivers. In contrast to the Mesopotamian tradition, carrying one's own arrow container did not offend royal dignity, which should be associated with the Scythian treatment of gorytos, which became an inseparable object accompanying warriors. The commonness of their use may be regarded as a kind of obviousness without the necessary connection with royal power. However, on relief IV from Bishapur showing Bahram II [Fig. 9]³⁸ coming on horseback in front of a group of people standing in front of him, with horses and camels in the background, the ruler is shown holding a bow and three arrows in his left hand. These weapons are not depicted in use. The king appears to be presenting them, recalling the source of his power. At the same time, the row of standing figures, in front of the king dominating them in size, holding a bow in his hands, is reminiscent of the aesthetic concept of the relief from Sar-e Pol-e Zohab II and the relief of Darius the Great from Behistun. In the case of the relief of Bahram II, instead of manipulating the scale, the equestrian ruler is confronted with pedestrians. Naturally, the first figure is shown in Persian and the others in Arabian dress, but a detailed analysis of the content of the relief is beyond the scope of the present text and does not affect the question of the function of the bow and arrow as an insignia of power, and possible formal dependence on Achaemenid models.

³⁸ OVERLAET, 2009.

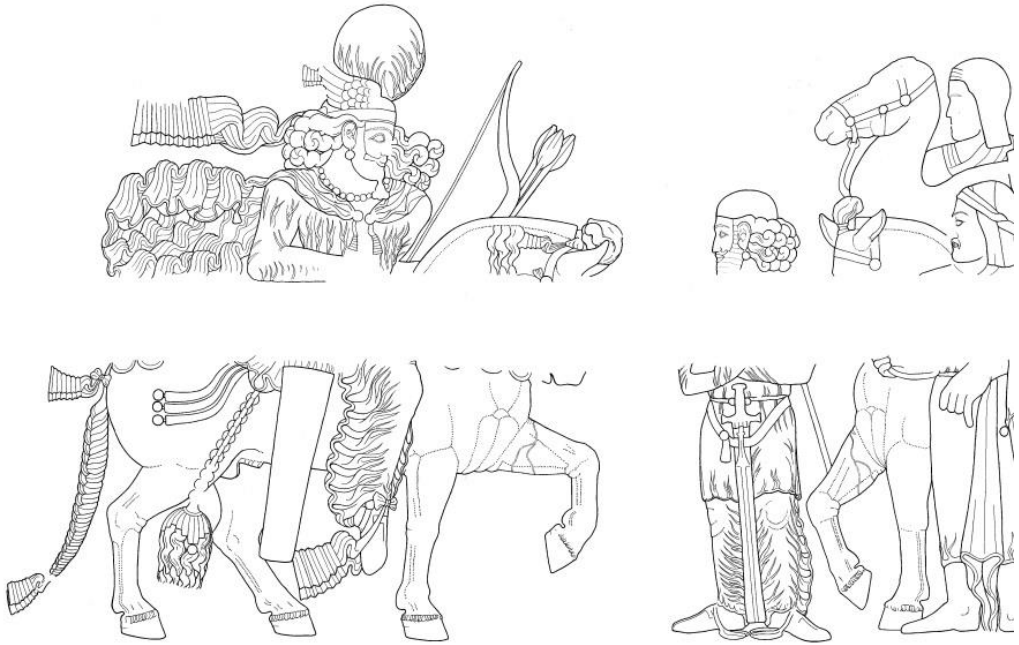


Fig. 8. Relief of Bahram II at Bishapur IV (detail), after OVERLAET, 2009: fig. 1.

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To cite this article: Skupniewicz, P. (2021). The bow as an insignia of power in the art of ancient Iran. *Historia i Świat* 10, 153-170, DOI: 10.34739/his.2021.10.06



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