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The Development of Sasanian Swords (Coins, Dishes and Bas-Reliefs)

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Abstract

Sasanian Empire was one of the most powerful periods in ancient Iran. Archaeological evidence and traces, and Sasanian and Post-Sasanian texts show cultural and artistic relations of the Sasanian Empire from the East to the West. However, official Sasanian methods of warfare are one of the most important legacies of the period that have been less studied. These offensive and defensive arms and armor can be analyzed by looking at remaining evidence left by kings and officials within the national borders to the lands abroad. Sasanian swords are depicted on rock reliefs, silver dishes, and coins (drachmas and dinars). Although studies have been done on the classification of Sasanian swords shown on rock reliefs, no systematic study on the depiction of Sasanian swords on Sasanian drachms has been done so far. The following paper tries to restudy the subject by comparing the swords depicted on Sasanian coins and compare them to the swords shown on rock reliefs and dishes. Sasanian swords are depicted on different Sasanian royal arts such as Sasanian coins, Sasanian silver dishes, and Sasanian rock reliefs. Different elements will be taken into consideration such as the shape of swords in general and their method of hanging from the belt in particular. A closer look shows that Sasanian drachmas and dinars show two major types of hanging Sasanian swords via a scabbard slide system: A. hanging the sword in front of the body. B. hanging the sword on the left or the right hip. Additionally, the following paper will compare them to some extant examples of Sasanian swords that are kept in museums and private collections.

Keywords: Sasanian Swords, Rock Reliefs, Silver Works, Coins, Scabbard Slide System, Two-Point Scabbard System, Feather Pattern.

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Introduction

As an empire, the Sasanians had to face several enemies of their state such as the Romans, the Arabs, nomadic people of Central Asia, Turks, etc. To do so the Sasanian Spah needed an effective combination of both offensive and defensive warfare technology and tactics (Moshtagh Khorasani, 2006: 84-98; Masia, 2000: 185). Some Middle Persian texts such as Ayadgar-i- Zariran specifically to MS. U. 29 and Zoroastrian texts in New Persian, i.e. Sanjan Story have kept information on the swords; probably it can help for a typology of Sasanian swords. The development of Sasanian swords is based on a continuation of the Parthian tradition of making double-edged long swords with a cross-guard that used to be hung with a scabbard slide system and then influenced the development of the scabbard slide into a two-point horizontal hanging towards the end of the empire. One of the sources is the Tiratsian with chapters written by contemporary Armenian historians of the Sasanian period in the first half of the 5th century CE (Ghirshman, 1963: 295). Armenia was the center of the conflicts between Parthia and the Romans which continued to the Sasanian Empire. However, the text states that the Sasanians carried three types of edged weapons:

• Tour (short sword): A short sword attached to a belt or goti on the right side. This weapon was widely used and had two attachments among the Palmyrenes and the Sogdians in the 7th–8th centuries CE.

• Sousser (long sword): A long sword attached to the sword belt or goti on the left side with the help of a scabbard slide.

• Nran (dagger): A dagger attached to the thigh.

Methods of Hanging Sasanian Swords

Next to the crown, the sword served as a symbol of rank and authority in the Sasanian empire (Gunter and Jett, 1992: 217). Zoroastrian religion was a significant factor that there are no graves of Sasanian kings left since the burial of the dead was strictly forbidden. Therefore, excavated Sasanian swords or swords obtained from historical sites cannot be attributed to any specific king or an official with any degree of certainty. However, two types of hanging the sword can be seen on Sasanian representations and examples: A. scabbard slide system. B. Two-point scabbard fittings.

- Scabbard slide system

The early method of carrying a Sasanian sword consisted of hanging it with a scabbard slide system attached to the upper central part of the scabbard. A scabbard slide has one scabbard fitting that allows passing a cord through it. This allowed the sword to be hung in front of the body or on the side of the body vertically. They resembled the same manner of hanging a sword, broad crossguards, and long straight double-edged blades as their Parthian predecessors. A scabbard slide system could be used effectively by the cavalry as the depiction in the Naqsh-e Rostam. Shapur I is shown resting his left hand

on the hilt, pressing the sword 45 degrees to the right, allowing the scabbard to rest on the flank of the horse behind his leg (Farrokh, 2005: 11). The scabbard slide system can be seen on several Sasanian coins attributed to Shapur I (240-272 CE), Bahram I (273-276 CE), Bahram II (276-293 CE), Narseh (293-303 CE), Khosrow I (531-578 CE), Khosrow II (591- 628 CE), Ardashir III (628–630 CE), and Farroxan (Tabaristan, 712-728 CE).

- Two-point or two-loop scabbard fittings

A later method with two loops or scabbard fittings allowed passing a belt for hanging the sword diagonally or horizontally (Harper, 1978: 83; Gunter and Jett, 1992: 218).

Although some archaeological examples of Sasanian swords are described as swords with narrow blades, curved hilts, and with a small guard or no guard at all (Masia, 2000: 218), earlier Sasanian swords have wider blades with a crossguard as we will see below. So many researchers refer to this type of Sasanian sword to existing archaeological examples. To other Sasanian decorative art, swords are decorated with a feather pattern (Harper, 1978). This feather is often described as a symbol of the Varagan bird that was one of the symbols of Verethragna, the Zoroastrian deity of victory (Farrokh, 2005: 13). The same feature can be seen on scabbard mountings and jewelry from the late Hunnish period. Another feature of the Sasanian swords with P-shaped scabbard fittings is the indentation on the handle found on most examples and intended for the index finger. One example has four indentations on the hilt, similar to an example of an Avar sword. The shape of the scabbard tip on Sasanian swords is also similar to Avar swords. There are two influences on Sasanian swords: 1. the decorative influence used by the Huns and 2. Avar P-shaped attachments on scabbards and scabbard tips (Masia, 2000: 218).

Thus, there is a widespread belief among western researchers that this type of sword with P-shaped scabbard mounts was not originally Sasanian in design and that the Sasanians adopted such weapons and mounts from the Central Asian attendants, such as the Hephthalites in a long proposed period between the late 4th or early 5th century CE to the 6th century CE (Ghirshman, 1963: 296; Harper, 1978: 83; Gunter & Jett, 1992: 218; Lebedynsky, 2001: 156) or even from the Turkish tribes or Avars, who had largely displaced Iranian speakers in Central Asia by the 4th century CE (Farrokh, 2005: 12). This method was a convenient manner for mounted attendants to carry their swords (Harper, 1978: 83). We should note that the 10th-century-CE historian Tabari reports that after attacking the Khazars and Alans who invaded Iran and Armenia, Khosrow I (531–578 CE) captured 10,000 prisoners and sent them to Azarbayjan and neighboring regions. These defeated attendants could have certainly carried swords with P-shaped mounts. However, due to the conservative nature of Sasanian dynastic art, the standard Sasanian sword with a scabbard slide continued to be shown on rock reliefs and vessels long after it had disappeared from actual use. However, swords with two-point scabbard systems can also be seen at Taq-e Bostan in a few cases. These might have not been

considered appropriate for special religious ceremonies. As far as the invention and the effectiveness of two scabbard loops or the P-shaped scabbard fittings are concerned, the opinions of scholars differ. Some consider such an invention a clear improvement for the cavalry (Harper, 1978: 83), whereas others consider the two-point (double-locket) system or P-shaped scabbard system a clear improvement in sword suspension a clear improvement for the infantry soldiers. There is no doubt that infantry soldiers could only carry a sword via the scabbard slide system on marches by constantly applying pressure to the sword hilt, otherwise, the scabbard chape would drag on the ground. A P-shaped scabbard system allows a changing angle of the sword tilt and this allows an attendant to adjust the angle based on his preferences and needs. This is a factor that is advantageous both for a cavalry rider and also an infantry soldier. However, Farrokh (2005: 12) observes it has nothing to do with a faster drawing of the sword as some researchers believed.

A Central Asian wall painting Pandjkent (Fig. 1) of the late 5th or 6th century CE shows how an attendant is hanging a sword via two hemispherical mounts arranged along one side of the scabbard. A sword with a similar suspension system carried by a mounted hunter can be seen on a wall painting on plaster in the National Museum of Iran. This wall painting was found in Tappe Takestan in Nishapur, Khorasan Razavi, and is attributed to the 9th century. This is an indication that this type of suspension system and swords remained in use long after the fall of the Sasanian period. Based on drawings of late Sasanian swords from the 5th and 6th centuries showing attendants with swords with guardless grips and a similar suspension system, Lebedynsky (1992: 52, 76) even assumes that this type of sword was possibly the prototype of today's shashkas used in Caucasia.

Fig. 1: A sword hanging with two hemispherical mounts (National Museum of Iran).

Types of Sasanian swords

Sasanian swords can be divided into four parts mainly: A. Sasanian swords with a crossguard. B. Sasanian swords without a crossguard or a very small crossguard and a P-shaped scabbard system. C. Sasanian swords with a rectangular guard and a scabbard without scabbard fittings. D. two-handed Sasanian swords.

a. Sasanian swords with a crossguard

There are two samples of these swords of this type that are kept in the National Museum in Tehran (Fig. 2). As far as their appearance is concerned, these swords are like the Parthian swords. Their striking feature is that they have a crossguard. This feature makes these swords resemble Sasanian swords portrayed on Sasanian rock reliefs, such as the Sasanian rock relief in the Tang-e Chogan, close to Bishapur, which are described by Masia (2000: 188–209). Both swords were excavated by archaeologists directed by Mohsen Mogaddam in Niavol in the province of Gilan in 1961 CE. In contrast to Sasanian swords with the P-shaped suspension system, these swords have crossguards, and, thus, these swords resemble the swords portrayed on the majority of the Sasanian rock reliefs.

Fig. 2: A Sasanian sword with a crossguard (National Museum of Iran).

b. Sasanian swords with two-point or P-shaped scabbard fittings

As far as the length of these swords is concerned, most researchers describe their length as 1 to 1.10 m (Fig. 3), asymmetrical hilt with a curve for the index finger, a "saddleback roof" shape on top of the hilt, most without handguards, and if any a small handguard, no tapering towards the tip of the scabbard, two P-shaped scabbard attachments with a riveted loop on their back, gold or silver sheet covering the wooden scabbard, and most are covered with a feather pattern on the front side and spirals on the back (Overlaet, 1982: 195–196). There are two Sasanian swords with P-shaped scabbards kept in the National Museum, Tehran. One of them has an infinite grid pattern consisting of different cells on the obverse side of the scabbard and handle. Each cell shows a feather motif. It has a double-edged blade. The handle has indentations and no crossguard. It lacks a pommel, but the end of the handle has a hat-shaped or roof-shaped plate soldered on top of the grip. The handle is partially broken showing some fabric or other residuals, probably a mixture of fossilized wood and adhesive material, below the handle. The scabbard is also partially broken as the projected area of the lower P-shaped attachment is broken. However, portions of its missing parts are still available. Additionally, the scabbard area between these two P-shaped attachments is missing. There could be two

reasons for this: Some specimens have the whole scabbard covered in a silver sheet, whereas there are other examples that do not have the whole scabbard covered with silver sheets as this area was probably covered by leather like the Sasanian sword from the Musée du Louvre (Paris), which has a scabbard consisting of three areas: an upper P-shaped attachment, a lower P-shaped attachment, and the chape (Masia, 2000: 257). The scabbard chape has the same shape as the top of the handle, meaning that a separate, hat-shaped, or roof-shaped plate is soldered to the end of the scabbard. Six silver wires in the form of spirals placed in 3 rows decorate the back of the lower part of the scabbard. Another Sasanian sword from the National Museum of Iran in Tehran has a silver-covered scabbard and handle but without a feather pattern (for examples of Sasanian swords without a feather pattern). Due to heavy rust, this sword cannot be unsheathed. The whole indented handle and the scabbard are covered with a silver sheet. The upper part of the handle is covered with a roof-shaped or hat-shaped piece soldered to the top of the handle. The same is the case with the lowest part of the scabbard, which also has a similar piece. On the back of the P-shaped scabbard attachments are two riveted loops. A strap was passed through these loops so the sword could be carried in an oblique position from the belt. On the front side of the scabbard, there are four golden embossed circles positioned between the two P-shaped attachments. The silver sheet encircles the whole scabbard and is soldered to the back. Two separate rows of silver lines strengthen this soldered line. Ten silver circles are soldered to the scabbard on both sides of these lines in two rows between the two P-shaped scabbard attachments. Six spiral circles in rows of two are also positioned on both sides of these lines between the lower P-shaped scabbard attachment and the scabbard tip. Some swords of this type have their feather pattern was combined with parallel stripes, floral elements, granulations, or inlays of garnets and glass (Overlaet, 1982: 196-198).

Fig. 3: A Sasanian sword covered with silver sheets (National Museum of Iran).

c. Sasanian swords with a rectangular guard and without P-shaped scabbard attachments

There are two Sasanian swords of this type: One is in the National Museum of Iran, and the other is in the Reza Abbasi Museum (Moshtagh Khorasani, 2006: 423, Cat. 66, 67). Both have the decoration and shape of Sasanian swords with P-shaped scabbard attachments. The interesting feature of these swords is that both bear the typical characteristics of

Sasanian swords with P-shaped scabbards, but they lack this typical suspension system of the P-shaped attachments. All Sasanian swords that were described by Masia (2000: 256–258) have these P-shaped scabbard attachments. However, Richardson (1994: 177) shows a very similar Sasanian sword and describes it as a 5th century CE Hunnish sword with a beaked pommel. Additionally, Overlaet (1982: 198) refers to an example of a Sasanian sword that was offered for sale on the art market and lacked P-shaped attachments but it had a reinforcement band near the mouth of the scabbard. The two swords from Iranian museums resemble each other in almost all other aspects. The common features of these swords are as follows:

- Both swords have beak-shaped handles.
- There are two rings attached to the back of the handle. These rings were meant to pass a cord to attach the handle to the wrist.
- A feather motif pattern engraved in each cell decorates the front side of the scabbard and handle.
- There is a rectangular guard positioned between the handle and the blade.
- Four spiraled silver circles placed in rows of two are positioned on the back side of the rectangular guard.
- Twelve spiraled silver circles in rows of two (2 x 6) are placed on the back of the scabbard.
- The tang bands (handle straps) on the handle of both swords are decorated with feather patterns.
- The blades of both swords are double-edged. The blade of the sword from the Reza Abbasi Museum cannot be unsheathed as it is stuck in the scabbard.

On the other hand, the blade of the sword from the National Museum of Iran in Tehran (Fig. 4) still has good flex and temper to it despite the age of the blade. Nicolle (2002 plates 17a – b) shows the sword from Reza Abbasi Museum in Tehran and describes it as single-edged. However, the sword from the National Museum of Iran, which resembles this sword, is double-edged. That should be the case with this example as well. The lower part of the scabbard of both swords shows a soldered hat-shaped or roof-shaped piece.

Fig. 4: A double-edged Sasanian sword (National Museum of Iran).

The major discrepancy and one of the most astonishing peculiarities of these swords is the total lack of a P-shaped suspension system, and there is no extra loop allowing for suspending the sword.

This leaves speculation as to how this type of sword was suspended from the belt. One possibility could be that the sword was tucked under the belt or sash. Further, the guardless handles do not have an indented grip. At the end of the pommel, there is no hat-shaped plate soldered to the top of the grip. Moreover, there is a single piece of handle strap covering the entire area of the sides and top of the handle. This handle strap is soldered to the two silver handle scales. Close to the handle, there is a rectangular guard (which is not found in other archaeological examples with P-shaped scabbard attachments). The scabbards do not taper towards the end but remain rectangular and do not widen.

d. Two-handed Sasanian sword

There are also examples of two-handed Sasanian swords that are depicted on Sasanian rock reliefs such as the rock relief of Shapur I at Bishapur, the rock relief of Bahram II at Sarab-e Qandil (also called Tang-e Qandil), and investiture relief of Khosrwo II in Taq-e Bostan. These reliefs will be discussed in detail in this article later. There is also a two-handed Sasanian sword that is kept in the National Museum of Iran in Tehran (museum number 1574/7999). This sword was excavated by Mohsen Mogaddam in Amarlu in 1961 CE. This sword is the first known archaeological example of a two-handed Iranian sword. Although there are reports of two-handed Parthian and Sasanian swords on stone reliefs, statues, and silver plates, none of them resemble the shape of this ype of sword (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5: A two-handed Sasanian sword (Private Collection).

Two-handed Sasanian swords are also shown on Sasanian rock reliefs. These swords are shown on the rock relief of Khosrow II in Taq-e Bostan (Fig. 60) where the king is holding a two-handed sword in the middle of his body. On the triumph relief of Shapur at Bishapur (Fig. 37), two groups of Sasanian soldiers are depicted carrying swords with two-handed hilts. Two-handed swords are also shown on the rock relief of a family scene at Sarab-e Qandil (also called Tang-e Qandil; Fig. 45). Both men are wearing swords with long handles. Finally, the relief of Khosrow II in Taq-e Bostan shows the king who is holding a two-handed sword in the middle of his Body (Fig. 60).

Sasanian swords depicted on coins

As we mentioned before a widespread belief among researchers maintains that P-shaped scabbard mounts were not of Sasanian origin but of Central Asian origin and the Sasanians adopted this method of hanging their swords between the late 4th or early 5th century CE to the 6th century CE (Harper, 1978: 83; Gunter & Jett, 1992: 218;

Lebedynsky, 2001: 156), or even from the Turkish tribes or Avars, who had largely displaced Iranian speakers in Central Asia, by the 4th century CE. Sasanian coins show attendants carrying swords. Although the depiction of swords is not clear at times, one can see a difference in the method of hanging the swords on Sasanian coins. The silver drachmas and dinars attributed to Shapur I show the left attendant who is hanging his sword perpendicularly on the left side of his body and resting his left hand on the sword hilt. In this position, one can assume that the attendant is in the ready position to draw the sword. In such a case, all a right-handed attendant needs to do is slide the left hand on the scabbard and grab the sword hilt with the right hand. As the scabbard is already in a slanted position, the attendant can easily draw the sword from such an angle or position. The attendant on the right also seems to be using a scabbard slide system and he is also carrying the sword on the left side of his body.

However, the positions show one major difference. On the dinars attributed to Shapur I, one can see two attendants clearly so the system of carrying the sword is better to observe on this coin. The attendant on the left is visibly carrying his sword perpendicularly by pushing the sword to the left side of his body. The sword is hanging on the left hip of the attendant. On the other hand, the attendant on the right side is carrying his sword with a scabbard slide system although the sword is not hung in the middle of the body as it is the traditional way but the sword is also hanging on the left side of the body. The attendant is resting his right hand on top of the pommel of the sword. The scabbard slide is visible.

The coins attributed to Shapur I show both methods of hanging the sword via a scabbard slide system (Fig. 6-8). In an earlier publication, Trousdale (1975: 90) already distinguished between two methods of hanging a Sasanian sword via a scabbard slide system:

A. Sword hanging on the left side of the body/hip with the sword hilt inclining forward (see: coins attributed to Shapur I. B. Sword hanging in the middle/center of the body with the sword chape close to the ground or even resting on it (see: coins attributed to Ardashir III, and Farroxan (Tabaristan local national ruler). Tousdale considers wearing the sword on the left side of the body a position of readiness where the sword rests tightly against the clasp joining two ends of the belt (Trousdale, 1975: 90). Trousdale believes that such a clasp secured the belt and hindered the sword from moving forward away from the left side. What Trousdale does not consider is the different positioning of the hands on sword handles on Sasanian coins. The attendant on the right side (reverse) on coins attributed to Shapur I is placing his right hand on top of the pommel of the sword in similar way as depicted in a position when the sword is carried in the middle of the body (see: the coin attributed to Khosrow II to Ardashir III).

The coins attributed to Bahram I and Bahram II show two attendants on both sides of a fire temple as well (Fig. 9). On these coins, both attendants on the left side wear their swords on the left side/hip of their body at a perpendicular angle. Their left hand

Fig. 6: Shapur I: drachms and dinar and hanging the sword via a scabbard slide system.

Fig. 7: Attendants holding left hands on the hilts.

Fig. 8. Attendants holding right hands on the hilts.

is on the sword hilt. However, the attendants on the right side of these coins wear their swords on the right side of their bodies and rest their right hand on the sword hilt.

In the following, the drachm on the left side attributed to Bahram II shows two attendants hanging their swords at a perpendicular angle. Similar to the dinars attributed to Bahram I, the attendant on the left is hanging his sword on the left hip and resting his left hand on the sword hilt (Fig. 10-11). The attendant on the right side is wearing his sword on the right side (hip) of his body. However, the positioning of his right hand does not follow a straight line to be rested on the sword hilt. On the drachma on the right side

attributed to Bahram II, the attendant on the left seems to be hanging his sword on his back in a perpendicular fashion. The sword hilt sticks out from the left side of his body. The remarkable thing is that the person standing on the right side of the right drachma is not wearing any sword. We should note that females (queens and goddesses) appear in such a position on the coins and on the bas-reliefs. With Bahram II, the portrait of the females has found a remarkable position in the Sasanian art.

Fig. 9. L: attendant holding l. hand on the hilt and r., attendant holding right hand on the hilt.

Fig. 10: On the right drachm, on the left side, the attendant does not carry a sword.

Fig. 11: Details of wearing the swords by attendants.

On a drachm of Narseh, both attendants (Fig. 12) are similarly carrying their swords as the attendants depicted on dinars attributed to Bahram I. It means that the attendant on the left side is wearing his sword on the right side/hip of his body at a perpendicular angle. His right hand is placed on the sword hilt. The attendant on the right side of the coin is wearing his sword on the left side of his body and rests his left hand on the sword hilt.

Similar to coins of Narseh and Bahram I, the coin attributed to Khosrow I also shows two attendants perpendicularly hanging their swords (Fig. 13). Thus, the attendant on the left side is wearing his sword on the left side/hip of his body via a scabbard slide at a

Fig. 12: Narseh's drachms show the same tradition of Bahram I.

Fig. 13: Attendants on Khosrow I's drachms wearing perpendicularly hanging swords.

perpendicular angle. His left hand is placed on the sword hilt. The attendant on the right side of the coin is wearing his sword on the right side of his body and rests his right hand on the sword hilt. Compared to the pervious coins, there is a significant difference as on these coins attendants who are holding their swords with the left hand are also shown.

Drachmas attributed to Ardashir III show the older method of carrying a sword namely carrying the sword in the middle of the body via the scabbard slide system. Both attendants are resting their right hand on top of the pommel and their left hand is grasping the sword scabbard close to the hilt (Fig. 14).

After the fall of the Sasanian empire, the drachmas attributed to Farroxan (Post-Sasanian, Tabaristan) also show (drachm on the right side of Fig. 15) the conservative method of carrying a sword, namely the scabbard slide system that hangs the sword in the middle of the body (see: drachm of Khosrow II on the right side of Fig. 15). Although by the time of Farroxan, a two-point hanging system should have been a more dominant style. This is due to the historical fact that all kings after Khosrow II followed him for minting coins and this is true from late Sasanian to Tabaristan rulers. Additionally, this could be a reference to the old dynastic tradition as a way of identification with the powerful Sasanian empire that had been brought to fall at that time.

Fig. 14: Attendants resting right hands on top of the pommel on Ardashir III drachms.

Fig. 15: Attendants carrying swords in the middle of the body on Khosrow II and Tabaristan darchms.

We should note that the P-shaped scabbard style was introduced the latest during the period of Khosrow I when he took 10,000 prisoners after his attacks on the Khazars and Alans who invaded Iran and Armenia and took them to Azarbayjan and neighboring regions. The general assumption is that these attendants should have surely carried swords with P-shaped mounts (Harper, 1978: 83–84). However, the Sasanian dynastic art was conservative in nature and hence the standard Sasanian sword with a scabbard slide continued to be shown on rock reliefs, such as in the investiture of Khosrow II at Taq-e-Bostan (Fig. 61) and vessels long after it had disappeared from actual use (Harper, 1978: 84; Farrokh, 2005: 12). It could be that Sasanian coins are using conservative dynastic art to show the swords with a scabbard slide system. Further, swords with two-point scabbard systems can also be seen at Taq-e Bostan in a few cases. But these might have not been considered appropriate for special religious ceremonies.

Sasanian intaglio and silver dishes

The following intaglio shows the victory of Shapur I over the Roman Valerian (Fig. 16). This intaglio clearly shows Shapur who is hanging his sword via a scabbard slide system and he is placing his left hand on the sword hilt.

A gilded silver work attributed to Hormizd II (303-309 CE) shows the king wielding a spear/lance with both hands (Fig. 17). He is wearing his sword via a scabbard slide system on his left hip.

Fig. 16: A Sasanian intaglio.

Fig. 17: A gilded silver work attributed to Hormizd II.

A gilded silver dish attributed to Shapur III (383-388 CE) also shows the king who has drawn his sword and is striking with it (Fig. 18). The scabbard is hanging on his left hip via a scabbard slide system.

On a gilded silver work attributed to Yazdgerd I (399-420 CE), we see him (Fig. 19) striking a stag with his sword. The scabbard of his sword is not visible, but what is remarkable is that he extends his right index finger over the crossguard of his sword in a grasp known as the "Italian grip" in the west. Late Sasanian swords with P-shaped scabbard fittings have mostly an indented handle that comfortably allows such grasping without the need to extend the index finger over the crossguard. Additionally, the late Sasanian swords lack a guard mostly (Fig. 20).

Fig. 18: A gilded silver tray attributed to Shapur III.

Fig. 19: Silverwork attributed to Yazdgerd I.

Earlier research has also pointed out different types of grasping a Sasanian sword by distinguishing a) the so-called "Italian grip" by placing the index finger above the sword guard and using the other three fingers and the thumb to hold the sword, and b) the "classical" grip by holding the sword handle with all fingers. Ghirshman, also, rightly observes that the indented grip of late Sasanian swords combines the advantages of both methods into one (Ghrishman, 1963: 296–297).

Fig. 20: The indented grip of a late Sasanian sword.

The gilded silver work (Fig. 21) attributed to Bahram V (412-439 CE) shows the king who is attacking a lion with his sword. He is also extending his right index finger over the sword guard.

The silver plate which can be possibly attributed to an official Iranian (northeast) is quite interesting as it shows (Fig. 22) the late development of a two-point scabbard fitting system on a Sasanian sword. It is believed that it was made by Sogdian artists. The sword is hung horizontally and two cords attached to two scabbard fittings are visible.

Fig. 21: A gilded silver plate attributed to Bahram V.

Fig. 22: A silver plate attributed to Sogdiana region.

On the other hand, the gilded silver plates attributed to Khosrow II; from a later period and another one (right) attributed to an official (unknown) hanging (Fig. 23) a sword on the (left) side of his horse via a scabbard slide system. This is again a testimony that the scabbard slide system was still being presented in a later period.

Fig. 23: Attribute to Khosrow II (left) and another one to an unknown official (right).

Generally, the sword crossguards depicted on Sasanian works and the intaglio can be divided into two groups (Fig. 24) as far as their width is concerned. A. all swords that are hung via a scabbard slide system have a wide crossguard (see: crossguards on swords attributed to Shapur I; Hormizd II; Shapur III; Yazdgerd I; Bahram V; Khosrow II). B. the sword that is hung via two-point hanging system seems to have a narrow crossguard (see: a crossguard attributed to an unknown official). This is in line with the existent Sasanian swords with P-shaped scabbard fittings which completely lack a crossguard have a narrow crossguard. As far as the shape is concerned, the crossguards seem to be of two types: a) crossguards with parallel lines (see: crossguards on swords attributed to Shapur I;Hormizd II; Shapur III; Bahram V; Khosrow II. C. with spatulated quillons (see: crossguards attributed to Yazdgerd I).

Fig. 24: Different forms of crossguards of Sasanian swords.

As far as the pommels of these swords are concerned, some of them are visible on the objects and some are hidden behind the sword hand. The visible ones can be divided into three major categories. A. globular pommels, such as the pommels of swords attributed to Shapur III and Khosrow II. B. rectangular pommels, such as the pommels of swords attributed to Shapur I (240-272 CE) and Yazdgerd I. C. pommels that run parallel to the hilt as far as their width is concerned, such as sword pommels attributed to Yazdgerd I and an unknown official (Fig. 22).

Sasanian rock reliefs

Sasanian rock reliefs can be encountered in many places in Iran, such as rock reliefs from different Sasanian periods in different locations such as Barm-e Dilak, Bishapur, Sarab-e Bahram, Sarab-e Qandil and Taq-e Bostan.

- Rock reliefs[2] representing Ardashir I

The rock reliefs depicting Ardashir (Luschey, 1986: online) include: A. the equestrian victory of Firuzabad showing the defeat of the Parthian Artabanus V. B. the investiture of Firuzabad. C. the investiture of Naqsh-e Rajab. D. investiture relief of Naqsh-e Rostam (defeat of Artabanus V). E. victory relief of Salmas. Some of the sword depictions shown on reliefs attributed to Ardeshir I, including those of Firuzabad, Naqsh-e Rajab and Naqsh-e Rostam are already analyzed by some researchers (cf. Masia, 2000: 188).

A. Equestrian victory of Firuzabad showing the defeat of the Parthian Artabanus (V)

On the stone relief of the equestrian victory of Ardashir in Firuzabad, we see three mounted combat scenes (Fig. 25-26). On the left, a Sasanian attendant grabs his Parthian opponent by placing his left arm around his neck and body. In the center of the relief, Shapur, the son of Ardashir, unsaddles Artabanus' vizier, and on the right, Ardashir defeats Artabanus (Ghirshman, 1971: 125). As far as swords are concerned, we see the handle of a sword hanging on the left side of the Sasanian attendant on the left side of the rock relief. The top of the handle or pommel resembles the top of the handle of the flanged handle of bronze swords from Luristan or even bronze swords from northern Iran and even to the pommel of an Achaemenid akinakes from the National Museum of Iran (Moshtagh Khorasani, 2006: 377-379; 398-399, 402, 409).

Fig. 25 & 26: Battlefield scene of Ardashir I in Firuzabad.

B. Investiture of Firuzabad

On the investiture of Firuzabad (Fig. 27) that is related to the rock relief of equestrian victory, Ardashir I (Ghirshman, 1971: 131). All four figures are carrying a Sasanian sword hanging in the middle of their body via a scabbard slide system. All swords are hanging vertically and the page and three noblemen are placing their left hand on top of the pommel of each sword.

Fig. 27: Investiture scene of Ardashir I in Firuzabad.

C. Investiture of Naqsh-e Rajab

Sasanian reliefs in Naqsh-e Rajab (Fig. 28) attributed to Ardashir I show swords being carried via a scabbard slide system. The relief depicts a standing position of Ardashir I. To the left of the king, there are two courtiers. Both carry a sword via a scabbard slide in the middle of their body. They are resting the wrist of their left hand on top of the sword pommel.

Fig. 28: Scabbard slid system swords in Naqsh-e Rajab.

d) Investiture relief of Naqsh-e Rostam (defeat of Artabanus IV or V)

The investiture relief of Ardashir I at Naqsh-e Rostam (Fig. 29) is very important as it shows the start of the Sasanian royal art. The horse of Ardashir is stepping on the Parthian king Artabanus. No figure is carrying a sword in this investiture (cf. Ghirshman, 1971: 132).

Fig. 29: The king is not carrying a sword possibly to show respect to the Lord (cf. Akbarzadeh, 2023: in review).

e) Victory Scene of Salmas

The rock relief of Salmas (Fig. 30-31) shows two Sasanian cavalrymen. Each mounted attendant is holding a man. These might be captives see Livius.org. The importance of this relief for our study is that both attendants are carrying a sword on their left hip via a scabbard slide system. They are placing their left hand on the sword handle signaling a ready position for combat.

Fig. 30: Cavalrymen carrying swords on their left hip, Salmas bas-releif.

Fig. 31: Scabbard slide system swords in Khan-Takhti bas-releif.

- Rock reliefs of Shapur I (240-272 CE)

The rock reliefs depicting Shapur include:

A. Investiture of Shapur at Naqsh-e Rajab.

B. Equestrian relief of Shapur at Naqsh-e Rajab.

C. Triumph relief of Shapur at Naqsh-e Rostam (defeat of Philip and Valerian).

D. Triumph relief at Darabgard (defeat of Gordian III, Philip, and Valerian).

E. Investiture relief of Shapur at Bishapur (defeat of Gordian III and Philip).

F. Triumph relief of Shapur at Bishapur (defeat of Gordian III, Philip, and Valerian).

G. Victory relief of Shapur at Bishapur. The reliefs of Shapur I demonstrate a large amount of variation in the types of swords, specifically in the Shape of pommels (Masia, 2000: 196).

A. Investiture of Shapur at Naqsh-e Rajab

The investiture of Shapur at Naqsh-e Rajab (Fig. 32) does not show any swords. It could be that Sasanian kings, especially the earlier kings such as Ardeshir (Naqsh-e Rostam) and Shapur I, who appear without a sword when they receive a divine ring from Ahura Mazda are presented this way to show respect to God. This is evident in the relief of Ardeshir I (see: Fig. 29). This belief seems to fade away in later periods, such as the rock reliefs of Ardeshir II and Khosrow II in Taq-e Bostan. This possibly shows a difference in the religious understanding between the place of rising to power of Sasanians in Fars and their counterparts in the western parts of Iran (Kermanshah).

B. Rock relief of Shapur I and his loyal attendants at Naqsh-e Rajab

The equestrian relief of Shapur at Naqsh-e Rajab (Fig. 33) shows a mounted Shapur where nine people are standing behind him on foot.

Fig. 32: Shapur I does not carry a sword.

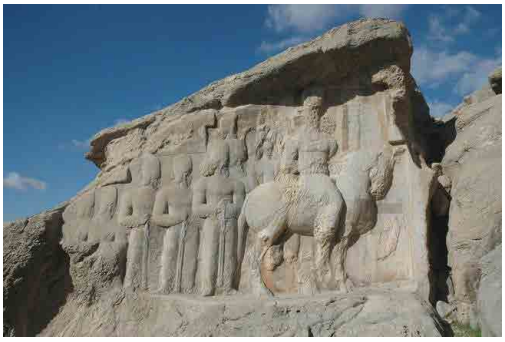

Fig. 33: Attendants of Shapur I are carrying swords via scabbard slide system.

Three figures behind the king are carrying a sword (Fig. 34) hanging in the middle of their body via a scabbard slide system. They are resting both of their hands on top of the pommel of their swords. The same posture of placing both hands on the handle of the sword can be seen on the Ardashir II and Shapur III bas reliefs (Taq-Bostan; see later) and coins (reverse) i.e. Khosrow II and the kings after him. Although there is a long period of time between the eras of Shapur and Khosrow II.

C. Triumph Scene of Shapur at Naqsh-e Rostam (defeating Valerian)

The triumph relief of Shapur in Naqsh-e Rostam is not only the most famous in this location (Fig. 35), but it is very important for the study of Sasanian swords as it shows the sword of Shapur and its details. Sasanian kings always appear in arms in front of their defeated opponents.

Fig. 34: This system of carrying swords, can be seen in the late Sasanian period.

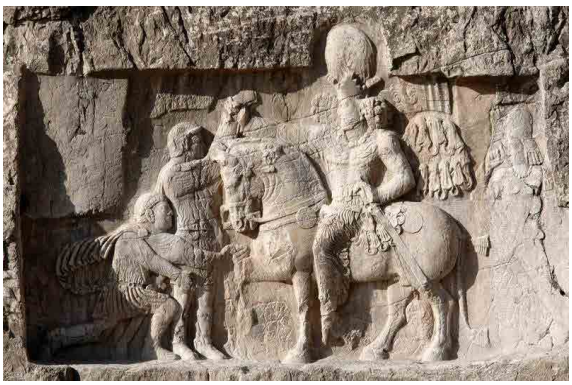

Fig. 35: Sasanian king, Shapur I, always appears in arms in front of Roman Emperor.

Shapur is carrying his sword via a scabbard slide system. The pommel of the sword seems to end in a cap that is bent towards the handle. Different researchers described this pommel as having different shapes such as a bar-shaped pommel or a griffin-head pommel (Masia, 2000:196; Ghirshman, 1971: 160). The pommel is more likely a curved hilt as can also be seen as a later adoption on a curved Persian shamshir with a curved-in pommel cap. He is placing the index finger of his left hand alongside the pommel cap.

D. Triumph Scene of Shapur at Darabgard (defeat of Gordian III, Philip, and Valerian)

The following relief is very important as the swords of three among four courtiers who stand behind king Shapur are carrying their swords (Fig. 36) via the scabbard slide system. The swords are hanging on the left side of their body and each one of them is placing his left hand on top of the pommel of the sword. The crossguard of swords is rectangular. All swords carried by courtiers behind Shapur I have segmented hilts. Such hilts lent the swordsmen a firmer grasp of the sword hilt (Ghirshman, 1971: 161).

E. Investiture Scene of Shapur at Bishapur (defeat of Gordian III and Philip)

The Investiture showing Shapur I in Bishapur is badly damaged. The horse of Shapur is stepping on the body of the Roman emperor Gordian III who fell in his campaign against the Sasanian forces in Ctesiphon (Fig. 37). Due to the heavy damage of the relief, no swords can be discerned from the relief.

Fig. 36: Attendands of Shapur I are carrying swords hanging via scabbard slide systems.

Fig. 37: No swords can be discerned in Bishapur scene due to the damages.

F. Triumph Scene of Shapur at Bishapur

The triumph relief of Shapur at Bishapur portrays the defeat of Gordian III, Philip and Valerian is much more complex and much better preserved (Ghirshman, 1971: 158). In stone reliefs depicting the victory of Shapur I over Roman emperors (Fig. 38) in Bishapur, Kazarun, we can also see several Sasanian swords.

Fig. 38: Triumph scene of Shapur I over Romans show different types of swords.

As we can see, most swords are carried on the left hip or side of the body via the scabbard slide system. The difference between this type of carriage compared to the soldiers depicted on the stone relief of Darabgard is that they have the left hand on the handle of the sword in a "ready" or combat position. Note that the sword is also hanging at a slanted angle. But one of the courtiers there is hanging his sword via a scabbard slide system in the middle of his body. Mushroom-shaped upper pommels are also portrayed on Sasanian rock reliefs such as in the rock relief of triumph relief of Shapur I in Bishapur. The Parthians and the Kushans already used this pommel shape and it dates to the earlier periods such as the Assyrian times. There is a Parthian statue from the Reza Abbasi Museum with a Mushroomed-shaped pommel (Moshtagh Khorasani, 2006: 86). Masia (2000: 197) suggests that the Sasanian form of the mushroom pommel may be a combination of Parthian and Sarmatian features.

Two groups of Sasanian soldiers are depicted carrying swords with two-handed hilts. The two-handed hilt swords date back to the Parthian period. There is a Parthian statue from Hatra holding a sword with a two-handed hilt. Masia (Ibid: 199) believes that at Bishapur II, wider guards are presented, and this could be an indication of a Sasanian tradition or a reflection of the evolution of the same type of guard.

G. Victory relief of Shapur I at Bishapur (triple victory)

The victory relief no. III of Shapur at Bishapur's Tang-e Chogan (Overlaet, 2017: online) shows Shapur's triple victory as demonstrated in Naqsh-e Rostam: Shapur's horse is stepping on the Roman emperor Gordian III (see: Fig. 39). There are also Philippus Arabs and a captured Valerian. Different infantry soldiers from different locations are also depicted carrying tributes.

Fig. 39: The king holding a sword in the middle of his body.

Victory scene in Bishapur: This rock relief (Fig. 56-57) shows King Shapur I and his victory over an unknown enemy (Ghirshman, 1971: 80). The relief consists of two registers. The upper register shows a seated king in the middle who is holding a sword in the middle of his body. He is holding the handle of the sword with his left hand. The soldiers who are closing in from the right are bringing prisoners. They are carrying swords via a scabbard slide system hanging on their left hip. The soldiers on the higher register approaching from the left are also carrying swords on their left hip via a scabbard slide system. On the lower register, soldiers who are standing on the left are carrying swords in the middle of their bodies via a scabbard slide system. In the lower register, a soldier is offering the decapitated head of an enemy and one of the soldiers standing behind him is carrying a sword in the middle of his body via a scabbard slide system.

Fig. 40: Attendants (left, lower scene), also, holding swords in the middle of their bodies.

- Rock reliefs of Bahram I

The investiture relief of Bahram I (Ghirshman, 1971: 167) in Bishapur shows the investiture of the King (Fig. 41). There is a defeated enemy under his horse that might have been added later to the relief.

The sword of Bahram is hanging via a scabbard slide system and he is placing his left hand on its handle. Masia (2000: 201) believes that the sword depicted on this relief has the same bar pommel and guard with flaring ends as those swords shown in the reliefs of Shapur I.

- Rock reliefs of Bahram II

The rock reliefs of Bahram II include: A. Audience relief at Naqsh-e Rostam. B. Audience relief at Sarab-e Bahram. C. Family scene at Sarab-e Qandil. D. Family scene at Barm-e Dilak. E. King and dignitary at Barm-e Dilak. F. King at Guyum. G. Arab envoys relief Bishapur. H. Fight against lions at Sar-Mashhad. I. Equestrian victory relief Naqsh-e Rostam (defeat of unknown Roman enemy).

A. Audience Scene Naqsh-e Rostam: The audience relief of Bahram II in Naqsh-e Rostam (Fig. 42) shows a standing Bahram II (Ghirshman, 1971: 170) who is placing his hands on top of the sword pommel (see: Fig. 33). The sword is hanging via a scabbard slide system between his legs. The sword is hanging via a scabbard slide system. Although a suggestion has been made that the scabbard tip of the sword depicted on the rock relief of Naqsh-e Rostam as a rectangular one (Masia, 2000: 202), the scabbard widens towards its tip on this relief.

Fig. 41: Scabbard slide system sword of Bahram I.

Fig. 42: Audience relief of Bahram II in Naqsh-e Rostam.

B. Audience Scene in Sarab-e Bahram: The rock relief of Bahram II (Fig. 43) in Sarab Bahram shows a seated king on his throne resting upon his sword. Two of his courtiers on the left are carrying swords via a scabbard slide system in front of their body (Ghirshman, 1971: 172). They are resting their left hand on top of the pommel of their swords. The swords depicted on the rock relief of Naqsh-e Rostam seem to have a rectangular scabbard tip.

C. Family scene at Sarab-e Qandil (also called Tang-e Qandil): The rock relief of Bahram II at Sarab Qandil (close to Kazerun) is one of the best-preserved Sasanian rock reliefs (Fig. 44). Both men are wearing a sword via the scabbard slide system. The swords have a long handle indicating a possibility of using the sword as a one-and-half or two-handed sword as well. The top of the pommels flares out. The scabbards widen towards their tip. Both men are wearing their swords on the left hip and have placed their left hand on the sword handle. Masia (2000: 202) describes these swords as a new sword form with a mixture of continuation of the sword traditions shown on the reliefs of Ardashir I and Shapur I with newly added decorative elements.

Fig. 43: Bahram II resting upon his sword.

Fig. 44: Bahram II and his attendant are carrying long swords.

D. Family scene at Barm-e Dilak: Two rock reliefs are located in Barm-e Dilak (nine kilometers from Shiraz). The male (Bahram II; Vanden Berghe, 1988: online) is wearing a sword via a scabbard slide system (Fig. 45). The scabbard widens towards its tip and the king is placing his hand on the sword handle.

E. King and dignitary at Barm-e Dilak: On the second relief in Barm-e Dilak, we can see Bahram II. The king (Fig. 46) is also wearing a sword via a scabbard slide system and is placing his hand on the sword handle.

Fig. 45: The king, Barm-e Dilak, carrying a long Sasanian sword.

Fig. 46: Bahram II wearing a scabbard slide system sword.

F. King at Guyum: The rock relief of Bahram II (or unknown king) at Guyum (west of Shiraz) shows the king (Fig. 47) standing with one of his hands raised. The relief seems to be unfinished (see: Livius.org). He is holding the pommel of a sword that has a very long handle with his left hand. The scabbard is hanging on his left hip via a scabbard slide system.

Fig. 47: At Guyum, the king carrying a long handle sword.

G. Arab envoys relief: The rock relief no. IV at Bishapur shows king Bahram II receiving an Arab envoy. The Persian guide of the envoys is a nobleman with a long sword (Fig. 48). He is carrying his sword via a scabbard slide system that is hanging in front of his body. He is placing his both hands on top of the pommel. Masia describes that some swords shown at Bishapur VI have wide guards flaring out at the ends, and one example has spherical knobs. A sword depicted in the relief of Bahram II in Bishapur IV has a brazil-nut pommel or a mushroom-shaped pommel, scabbard slide system, wide guard with bifurcated ends or flaring ends (Masia, 2000: 199, 202), and a rectangular scabbard tip widening slightly towards its tip. The same features can already be seen on reliefs from earlier periods.

H. Bahram's II fight against lions at Sar-Mashhad: Another rock relief of Bahram II at Sar-Mashhad (Fig. 49) the same site shows Bahram II (Ghirshman, 1971: 173) killing a lion with a sword strike. Masia (2000: 202) believes that the scabbard tips on this relief are rounded, and the king is using a sword with a type of pommel that has not appeared before on the Sasanian rock reliefs.

Fig. 48: Persian guide, Bishapur, carrying a long sword.

Fig. 49: Bahram II carrying a short sword.

The sword has a slanted grip (Fig. 50). The slanted grip can be seen on late Sasanian swords with P-shaped scabbard fittings. The top of the handle also seems to be a separate piece similar to the roof-shaped piece soldered to the sword grip of Sasanian swords with a P-shaped scabbard fitting.

Fig. 50: The slanted handle of Sasanian swords.

Bahram II is grasping his sword grip by extending his index and placing it over the guard. Western researchers call this way of grasping the "Italian grip". This is of course

a reference to how the Italians grasped their rapier grips centuries later. In the following figure (Fig. 51), the same way of grasping the sword grip shown on a Sasanian silver plate.

Fig. 51: Grasping the sword grip.

Masia (2000: 203) believes that with such a grasping method, there is no need for a pommel to counter-balance the sword weight and, hence, the pommel is small and reduced to a decorative element.

I. Equestrian victory Scene Naqsh-e Rostam (defeat of unknown enemy): Here, Bahram II who is defeating an enemy (Fig. 52) without swords can be discerned from these reliefs.

Fig. 52: No sword has been depicted in the scene at Naqsh-e Rostam.

- Rock relief of Narseh

The investiture of King Narseh (Fig. 53) is located close to the tomb of Darius I the Great in Naqsh-e Rostam (Ghirshman, 1971: 176). Two men are standing to his left. King Narseh and the courtier behind him are holding their left hand on the handle of their sword and both swords are hanging on the left hip possibly via a scabbard slide system. Swords of the king, the prince, and the first attendant shown on the relief of Narseh have bar-shaped pommels and flaring guards. Masia (2000: 204) believes that the sword of the prince shows an additional piece on the guard, which appears to be related to the ricasso. As the sword is sheathed, this seems to be a raising on the scabbard though.

- Rock relief of Hormizd II

The equestrian relief of Hormizd II (Fig. 54) is located below the Achaemenid tomb II. It shows how King Hormzid II unhorses an enemy with his lance (Schmidt, 1970: plate 91). Unfortunately, no swords are depicted on this rock relief.

Fig. 53: Narseh and attendant carrying a hanging sword in Naqsh-e Rostam.

Fig. 54: Hormizd II does not carry any sword.

Rock reliefs of Shapur II (309 – 379)

The rock reliefs of Shapur II (Schmidt, 1970: 95) is not carrying a sword on this relief.

Fig. 55: Shapur II without any sword.

Taq-Bostan: Investiture Scene of Ardashir II in Taq-e Bostan: The rock relief of Ardashir II in Taq-e Bostan shows a standing king. The king is standing on top of a defeated enemy who is the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate (Fukai and Horiuchi, 1972: LXXIV). Ardashir II is holding a sword on his left hip via a scabbard slide system. He is holding his left hand on the sword handle and pressing it down so much that the sword (Fig. 56) almost has a diagonal angle of a sword hanging via a later two-point system.

- Ardashir II (379-383) and Shapur III (383-388).

The investiture relief of Ardashir II or Shapur III is located in Taq-e Bostan (Fig. 57). This relief is located in a small cave in Taq-e Bostan and shows two kings (Fukai and Horiuchi, 1972: LXVI). Both standing kings carry swords in front of their bodies with a scabbard slide system. The handle of swords seems to be long that can also be wielded with two hands. They are placing their left hand close to the crossguard and their right hand on top of the pommel. Both scabbards seem to have a parallel structure with no discernable flaring or widening at the scabbard tip.

Fig. 56: Investiture scene in Taq-e Bostan.

Fig. 57: Sasanian kings with swords hanging frontally.

- Khosrow II the Victorious (590-628).

The rock reliefs attributed to Khosrow II include A. the rock relief of Khosrow II in Taq-e Bostan. B. the rock relief of king Khosrow II on horseback in Taq-e Bostan. C. Boar hunt at Taq-e Bostan. D. Stag hunt at Taq-e Bostan.

A. Investiture Scene of Khosrwo II in Taq-e Bostan: This investiture (Fig. 58) is the upper section of the central relief of Iwan in Taq-e Bostan (Fukai and Horiuchi, 1972: XXXV). Khosrow II is holding a two-handed sword in the middle of his body. It is hung via a scabbard slide system. It has a large crossguard with downward quillons and a very long handle. He is holding the upper section of the sword handle close to the pommel with his left hand.

B. The rock scene of king Khosrow II on horseback in Taq-e Bostan: The lower relief shows king Khosrow II clad in heavy armor wielding a lance and a shield (Fig. 59). However, no sword is presented in this relief.

Fig. 58: Khosrow II carrying a two handed sword.

Fig. 59: Khosrow II clad in a heavy armor in Taq-e Bostan.

C. Boar hunt at Taq-e Bostan: To the left of the central panel, King Khosrow II is shown standing in a boat aiming with his bow at wild boars (Fig. 60). No sword can be discerned carried by him or his entourage.

Fig. 60: Khosrow II doest not carry a sword.

D. Hunting Scene at Taq-e Bostan: This rock relief is situated to the right of the central panel and shows a mounted king Khosrow II hunting stags with his entourage (Fig. 61). Both King Khosrow II and another rider who is shooting with a bow are carrying their sword via a two-point system. This shows the transitional period from the scabbard slide system to the two-point system clearly.

As it was mentioned before in this article, the introduction of two-point scabbard mounts resulted in a change in the way and the method swords were carried and suspended.

Fig. 61: Khosrow II carrying a two point system sword.

Trousdale (1975: 95) states that this scabbard suspension system method was adopted in the 4th to 6th century CE. Two-point scabbard mounts or P-shaped scabbard attachments are very effective for carrying a sword. Contrary to the scabbard slide system, which makes the sword hang vertically in front of the body, or diagonally on the side of the body or hip, two-point scabbard mounts allow the swordsman to wear his sword in an oblique position. This is a much more effective way to carry a sword both for the cavalry and the infantry (Fig. 62).

The sword guards in these examples appear to be smaller in size as well. This can be the earliest presentation of this suspension system in a rock relief. The presentation of the scabbard slide next to the two-point scabbard attachment after the rein of Shapur II means that both systems were in use next to each other or as Masia (2000: 205) and Trousdale (1975: 92) suggest it could be artistic convention since the two-point system was already in use.

Fig. 62: Carrying swords in oblique position.

Trousdale 1975: p. 93 believes that Sasanian rock reliefs at Taq-e Bostan close to Kermanshah show suspension devices that are similar to the scabbard slide system. Trousdale (1975: 93) believes that on the smaller grotto showing the figures of Shapur II and Shapur III, the scabbards show rosettes that are meant to represent scabbard slides, The ends of the sword belt go over each other and extend to either side. As the grotto was carved during the rule of Shapur III (383-388 CE), Trousdale concludes that "the scabbard slide was no longer in use as a functional tool around that time and must have fallen out of favor late during the reign of Shapur II". At Taq-e Bostan, the Sasanian king observing the hunt from horseback and sheltered by an umbrella is carrying a sword at his left side via two straps attached at their upper ends to the garment belt and at their lower ends to the edge of the scabbard (Ibid: 94). This way based on Trousdale, the suspension system of Sasanian swords can be divided into a) a scabbard slide system, b) a suspension system with rosettes resembling a scabbard slide, and c) a two-point suspension system. We can differentiate and add P-shaped scabbard attachments as a further development of a two-point suspension system that is not shown on the trays and stone reliefs but can be seen among archaeological examples of swords attributed to the Sasanian period. Thus, the classification will be: A. a scabbard slide system. B. a suspension system with rosettes resembling a scabbard slide. C. a two-point suspension system. D. P-shaped scabbard attachments.

Decoration on Sasanian swords

The silver of gold sheets covering most Sasanian swords with P-shaped scabbard fittings are decorated with a feather pattern, although some of them are kept simple as well (Moshtagh Khorasani, 2006: 420-423; 418-419; 2010: 484-485; 486; 2021: 116-117). This type of decoration occurs both on Sasanian and Hunnic swords (Fig. 63). Some researchers attribute these feather patterns to an eagle or the legendary bird Simorg, which appears in Iranian mythology (Alarm & Gyselen, 2012: 274).

Fig. 63: P-shaped scabbard system.

The blade material of Sasanian swords

Although most researchers describe the blade material of Sasanian swords as iron (Trousdale, 1975: 95), one of the four Sarmatian and Alani blades dating to the 3rd or 4th centuries (two swords date to the 3rd or 4th centuries CE, one sword dates to a 7th century CE horse burial, and one saber dates to the later 11th century CE) discovered during excavations near the city of Kislovodsk in the Russian regions of the Northern Caucasus has a visible pattern on the steel surface (possibly patterned crucible steel) (Feuerbach, 2002: 48). Further, a technical investigation of two 6th century blades from the Sasanian period kept in the collection of the British Museum, reportedly found in the (dailaman) region of northwest Iran, shows that they were also made of crucible steel (Simpson, 2014: 1-28). These are the earliest known examples of sword blades with such a pattern.

Conclusion

Sasanian swords are depicted on different Sasanian royal arts such as Sasanian coins, Sasanian silver dishes, and Sasanian rock reliefs. As far as the method of hanging the swords is concerned, Sasanian swords are depicted as being carried in two general ways: a) the earlier method of the scabbard slide system and b) the later two-point scabbard hanging system. The former method allowed the attendant to hang his swords vertically or diagonally, whereas the latter method enable the attendant to hang his sword perpendicularly or horizontally. The two-point scabbard hanging system could be used to draw the sword faster both as infantry or cavalry soldiers. The two-point scabbard system seems to have been adopted by the Sasanians during their military confrontation in later periods. The opinions about the introduction of this scabbard hanging system into Sasanian Iran differ and a long period from the 4th to the 6th century CE is provided in the research. But even after the adoption of the new system, Sasanian silver drachmas and dinars continue to depict the earlier scabbard slide system in line with the conservative nature of Sasanian royal art. A closer look shows that Sasanian drachmas and dinars show two major types of hanging Sasanian swords via a scabbard slide system: A. hanging the sword in front of the body. B. hanging the sword on the left or the right hip. A very interesting point is no two-point scabbard hanging system is shown on Sasanian drachmas and dinars even not on Post-Sasanian drachmas attributed to Farroxan (Tabaristan, 712-728 CE). As it was shown before, all swords shown are hung via a scabbard slide system, such as in drachmas and dinars from the periods of Shapur I (240-272 CE), Bahram I (273-276 CE), Bahram II (276-293 CE), Narseh (293-303 CE), Khosrow I (531-578 CE), Ardashir III (628–630 CE), and Farroxan (Post-Sasanian, Tabaristan, 712-728 CE). Most Sasanian silver plates and intaglios also show the scabbard slide system as a hanging method for a Sasanian sword such as silver plates and intaglios attributed to Shapur I (240-272 CE), Hormizd II (303-309 CE), Shapur III (383-388 CE), Yazdgerd I (399-420 CE), and Khosrow II (590-628 CE). Only one gilded silver attributed to an official (Sogdiana) shows a two-point scabbard hanging

system. It seems that even the conservative nature of Sasanian royal art is kept in the depiction of swords on silver plates and coins. All swords shown on the rock reliefs are attributed to Ardashir I, Shapur I, Bahram I, Bahram II, Narseh, Shapur II, and Ardashir III show swords hanging via a scabbard slide system either in front of the body or on the side of the body. Only some reliefs attributed to Khosrow II show both styles: The investiture relief of Khosrwo II in Taq-e Bostan shows swords hanging via a scabbard slide system whereas the rock relief of stag hunting at Taq-e Bostan shows swords being hung via a two-point system. However, females have their special portraits in Sasanian legacies from coins to the bas-reliefs. They, as queens, attendants (i.e. Bahram II: Sar-Mashhad and his coins), or goddesses (Narseh rock relief, also Aban-Yasht of the Avesta) appear to be unarmed on the relics. Meanwhile, Ardashir (Naqsh-e Rostam) and Shapur I appear unarmed in front of the God/Goddess in investiture scenes (Akbarzadeh, 2023: in review). As an exceptional case, Shapur I is shown with his sword in the investiture scene in Bishapur where his enemy, Philipp the Arab, can be seen. It seems that this tradition changed with Bahram I and II. On Bahram II's coins (reverse), one armed attendant has portrayed opposite side an unarmed female (Gyselen, 2012: 252). It is too hard to believe that this female can be a Goddess because she does not have the signs of a goddess and is closer to the clothing and makeup of the queens (of the king). However, this tradition changed completely in Taq-e Bostan with the kings who created heresy. Ardashir II and Shapur III portrayed their figures meaningfully (cf. Daryaee, 2009: 34). These two kings along with Khosrow II are portrayed with arms in front of the God/Goddess (male and female deities).

In conclusion, all evidence taken from the coins shows the traditional manner of hanging a Sasanian sword is via a scabbard slide system. Only one silver plate attributed to an official and some reliefs attributed to Khosrow II show a two-point scabbard system. This finding supports the assumption of most researchers who provide a long period of the late 4th or early 5th to the 6th century CE for the introduction of a two-point scabbard hanging system in Iran. Future research should shed more light on the shape of Sasanian swords and their method of carrying.

Endnote

1. For this photo and other dishes, see: Les Perses Sassanides (Fastes d'un empire oublie 224-642) 2006: passim.
2. We thank Mr. Siavash Arya for the photos of the bas-reliefs.

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گسترش شمشیرهای ساسانی (بر پایهٔ سکه‌ها، آثار زرین و سیمین و نقش‌برجسته‌ها)

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چکیده

شاهنشاهی ساسانی یکی از قدرتمندترین دوره‌های سیاسی-تاریخی ایران باستان را شکل داده است. میراث، آثار باستان‌شناختی و نیز یادگارهای ساسانی (به زبان پهلوی) در کنار متون پساساسانی، نشان‌دهندهٔ پیوندهای فرهنگی و هنری این دوره در پهنهٔ گسترده‌ای از پیوند با شرق تا به غرب است. با وجود پژوهش‌های ساسانی‌شناسی، موضوع بررسی رزم‌افزارهای ساسانی کمتر موردتوجه بوده است. این میراث ارزشمند برجای مانده، شامل رزم‌افزارهای دفاعی و هجومی، از شاهان و دیگر بزرگان ساسانی کم‌وبیش در مرزهای داخلی فراوان به‌دست آمده است. انواع شمشیرهای ساسانی بر روی سکه‌های سیمین و دینارها تا به آثار زرین و سیمین و نقش‌برجسته‌ها و از راه میراث موجود در موزه‌ها و مجموعه‌های شخصی قابل فهم هستند. باوجود برخی پژوهش‌ها در ارجاع به رزم‌افزارهای ساسانی موجود در نقش‌برجسته‌ها، به کمتر کاری در این مورد بر پایهٔ سکه‌ها می‌توان ارجاع‌داد. این رزم‌افزارها، خواه به‌عنوان میراث اشکانی (که به ساسانیان رسید)، خواه به‌عنوان رزم‌افزارهای ساخته‌شده بر پایهٔ همین‌دسته آثار در آسیای میانه، خواه رزم‌افزارهای ساسانی در معنی أخص، در اینجا بررسی خواهد شد. از همین‌روی، این پژوهش به بررسی سنجشی میان گونه‌های نقش شمشیرهای برجای‌مانده برروی سکه‌ها، آثار زرین و سیمین و نیز نقش‌برجسته‌ها خواهد پرداخت. شکل شمشیرها، دسته‌ها، نوع قبضه‌ها، نوع حمل انواع شمشیرها، زاویهٔ بدن حامل، همانندی و ناهمانندی‌های این‌دسته رزم‌افزارها به توضیح و توصیف خواهد آمد. برای این موضوع، انواع شمشیرهای برجای‌مانده از دورهٔ هر شاه (بیاری مدارک) به توضیح کامل خواهد آمد؛ سکه‌های ساسانی گواه دو نوع حمل شمشیر به‌صورت مشخص هستند: الف) حمل شمشیر از میان بدن و نقش روبه‌رو. ب) حمل شمشیر در سمت چپ یا راست بدن.

کلیدواژگان: شمشیرهای ساسانی، نقش‌برجسته، سکه، آثار زرین و سیمین، شمشیر دولبه.

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مقدمه

شاهنشاهی ساسانی، یکی از مهم‌ترین دوره‌های تاریخی ایران باستان بوده است. از این‌روی، پیدایی میراث این شاهنشاهی پرافتخار در پهنهٔ بزرگی از جهان از غرب تا به شرق، جای شگفتی ندارد؛ هرچند در موضوع‌های مختلف درهم‌تنیده با شاهنشاهی ساسانی و میراث رنگارنگ آن بس گفته و نوشته‌اند، اما دربارهٔ رزم‌افزارهای این دوره با کمترین منابع روبه‌رو هستیم؛ دست‌کم در ایران، دربارهٔ ویژگی‌ها و دسته‌بندی شمشیرهای ساسانی کمتر سخنی، گزارش شده است. بی‌گمان موقعیت جغرافیایی ایران، رقبای قدرتمند و نوع تهدیدات، ساسانیان را به‌سوی تولید و بهره‌گیری از شمشیرهای مختلف سوق داده است. موضوع این پژوهش به توصیف، دسته‌بندی و گونه‌شناسی شمشیرهای ساسانی بر پایهٔ نگاربرجسته‌ها، سکه‌ها و آثار زرین و سیمین به‌شکل سنجشی می‌پردازد. بس آشکار است که نویسندگان، به‌دلیل شمار بالای آثار، این نوشته را بر پایهٔ محدودی از میراث ساسانی به انجام رسانیده‌اند.

شمشیرهای ساسانی: گونه‌ها

با توجه به نوع «آویزش شمشیرهای ساسانی از بدن» شاهان و ملازمان، می‌توان آن‌ها را به دو دستهٔ کلی تقسیم کرد: الف) شمشیرهای آویزان با یک بند حامل. ب) شمشیرهای آویزان با دو بند حامل.

منظور از شمشیرهای آویزان با یک بند حامل، به شمشیرهایی گفته می‌شود که بندی از یک‌سو به غلاف و از سویی دیگر به بدن شمشیرزنی که آن را حمل می‌کند، متصل است؛ این‌دست شمشیرها به‌شکل عمودی در جلوی بدن یا در یک‌سوی بدن به‌شکل آویزان قرار می‌گرفت. از این‌گونه، باید به شمشیرهای «شاپور اول»، «بهرام اول و دوم»، «نرسه»، «خسرو اول و دوم»، «اردشیر سوم» تا به فرخان (تبرستان) بر پایهٔ سکه‌هایشان اشاره کرد.

شمشیرهای آویزان با دو بند حامل، نوع جدیدتری از گونهٔ پیشین است. در این‌گونه، دو بند متصل به غلاف و کمربند به حامل اجازهٔ حمل شمشیر را به‌صورت مورب یا افقی می‌داده است. دستهٔ این‌دست شمشیرها از آرایه‌های مختلف بهره برده‌اند. شمشیرهای با دستهٔ Pشکل در زیرمجموعهٔ این‌دسته از رزم‌افزارهای ساسانی می‌گنجد؛ ازجملهٔ این‌دست شمشیر باید نمونهٔ موجود آن در موزه ملی ایران (به‌دست آمده از خراسان رضوی) اشاره کرد.

با وجود این، شمشیرهای ساسانی از دید ساختارشناسی به چهار دستهٔ زیر تقسیم می‌شوند:

۱. شمشیرهای ساسانی با محافظ دست.

۲. شمشیرهای ساسانی بدون محافظ دست یا دارای محافظ کوچک یا Pشکل.

۳. شمشیرهای ساسانی با حفاظ مستطیل‌شکل و غلاف بدون اتصالات (بند متصل).

۴. شمشیرهای ساسانی با جای دو دست (یک دسته با جای دو دست).

برای آن‌چه در بالا آمد، بر پایهٔ نگاربرجسته‌های ساسانی به توصیف و بررسی ویژگی‌های شمشیرهای شاهان و همراهان آن‌ها پرداخته می‌شود.

اردشیر اول

در نقش‌برجستهٔ فیروزآباد (صحنهٔ پیروزی بر شاه اشکانی)، همراه شاه ساسانی، شمشیری با قبضهٔ فلنجی در دست دارد که دستهٔ شمشیرهای مفرغی لرستان را به‌یاد می‌آورد. در نگارهٔ تاج‌ستانی (همان‌جا)، شاه و همراهان، با گونهٔ خاص شمشیر ساسانی، عمودوار آویزان از وسط بدن با بند حامل (پیوسته (متصل) به بدن آن‌ها) دیده می‌شوند. شاه و همراهان (سه نفر)، همگی، دست چپ خود را برروی دسته قرار داده‌اند. اردشیر در صحنهٔ تاج‌ستانی (نقش‌رجب)، با شمشیری

(آویزان از وسط بدن) با تک‌بند حامل (همان‌گونه همراهانش) دیده می‌شود؛ آن‌ها مچ دست چپ خود را برروی دستهٔ شمشیر قرار داده‌اند. در صحنهٔ تاج‌ستانی نقش‌رستم با تغیری متفاوت از نگاره‌های پیشین روبه‌رو هستیم؛ در اینجا شاه و همراهش (در برابر اورمزد) فاقد هرگونه رزم‌افزار هستند. در نگارهٔ سلماس (منسوب به اردشیر اول)، همراهان شاه دارای شمشیری با بند حامل (متصل) به بدن هستند؛ دستان چپ آن‌ها به‌گونه‌ای شمشیرها را لمس کرده که اصطلاحاً حالت «آماده‌باش» نام دارد.

شاپور اول

شاپور در صحنهٔ تاج‌ستانی در نقش‌رجب، هم‌چون اردشیر در نقش‌رستم، در برابر اورمزد فاقد هر گونه رزم‌افزار است. این دو صحنه (دو شاه) می‌تواند یادآور سنتی قدیمی باشد که سپسین‌تر از سوی ساسانیان کنار گذاشته شد. در دیگر صحنه در نقش‌رجب، سه نفر همراه شاپور، دارای شمشیرهایی از وسط بدن آویزان اما با تک بند حامل، با نگاهداشت هر دو دست خود بر روی دسته، دیده می‌شوند. این شیوهٔ حمل شمشیر در تاق‌بستان (اردشیر دوم و شاپور سوم) قابل فهم می‌آید. در صحنهٔ پیروزی شاپور بر «والرین» در نقش‌رستم، شاه ساسانی دارای شمشیری با تک‌بند حامل است؛ در نگارهٔ پیروزی شاپور بر دشمنان رومی خود در دارابگرد، سه تن از همراهان شاه، شمشیرهای با تک‌بند حامل دارند، درحالی‌که رزم‌افزارها در سمت چپ بدن آن‌ها دیده می‌شود و هرکدام دست چپ خود را بر دستهٔ شمشیر قرار داده‌اند. محافظ شمشیرها مستطیل‌شکل دیده می‌شود. در دیگر نگارهٔ پیروزی شاپور بر شاهان رومی (گردیانوس، فلیپ و والرین) به‌گونه‌های متفاوت از شمشیرهای ساسانی می‌توان ارجاع‌داد؛ در اینجا با تفاوتی آشکار در سنجش با همین نگاره در دارابگرد روبه‌رو هستیم. در این نگاره (کازرون)، همراهان شاه با قرار دادن دست چپ خود بر دستهٔ شمشیرها، در حالت آماده‌باش به تصویر آمده‌اند. افزون‌تر، دو دسته از سربازان ساسانی با شمشیرهای «دو دسته‌ای» نگاریده شده‌اند که می‌تواند یادآور میراث اشکانیان باشد. افزون‌بر این نگاره‌های صخره‌ای، سکه‌های سیمین و دینار شاپور اول نیز برای شناخت رزم‌افزارها مهم هستند. ملازمان نگاریده شده بر پشت سکه‌های این شاه بازتابی از نخستین مدارک نوع حمل شمشیر به دورهٔ آغاز ساسانی است.

بهرام اول و بهرام دوم

برخلاف بهرام اول، بهرام دوم دارای گنجینه‌ای از نگاره‌های مختلف در استان فارس است. بهرام دوم در نقش‌رستم با شمشیری آویزان در وسط دو پا، متصل به بدن با بند حامل، با نگاهداشت دو دست برروی دستهٔ رزم‌افزار دیده می‌شود. در نگارهٔ سراب بهرام، دو تن از همراهان بهرام در سمت چپ، هم‌چون نگارهٔ پیش با رزم‌افزار به تصویر آمده‌اند. در نگارهٔ سراب قندیل، بهرام دوم با شمشیری با دو دسته یا یک‌دسته و نیم نگاریده شده است. همراه نیز چون شاه، شمشیری در سمت چپ بدن با نگاهداشت دست چپ بر دسته، دیده می‌شود. در نگارهٔ برم دلک، بهرام گونهٔ شمشیر با تک‌بند حامل دیده می‌شود. با وجود این، بهرام دوم(؟)در نگارهٔ «گویم» شمشیری با دستهٔ بسیار بلند در دست چپ دارد. در نگارهٔ بیشاپور، راهنمای ایرانی اعراب، شمشیری بسیار بلند، آویزان از جلوی بدن با نگاهداشت دو دست بر دستهٔ آن، دیده می‌شود.

با وجود این، برروی برخی سکه‌های بهرام دوم، یکی از ملازمان (تصویر ۱۰، سمت راست) فاقد هر گونه رزم‌افزار است؛ برروی این سکه، ملازم سمت راست، برخلاف ملازم مسلح سمت چپ، دارای پوششی متفاوت نیز است. بس آشکار است که با بهرام دوم، بانوان (شهبانوها و ایزدبانوان) جایگاهی مهم در هنر شاهی یافتند. در میراث هنری ساسانی، بانوان بدون رزم‌افزار نگاریده شده‌اند؛

بهرام دوم همواره با شهبانوهای زیبای خود در نقش‌برجسته‌ها (کازرون، تنگ‌قندیل، برم‌دلک) به پیدایی می‌آید؛ از این‌روی، به گمانی بتوان این ملازم را یکی از شهبانوهای بهرام دوم نام گذاشت.

نرسه

نرسه و همراهش در نگارهٔ نقش‌رستم با شمشیر تک‌بند، هر یک دست چپ خود را برروی دسته قرار داده‌اند، دیده می‌شوند. در این نگاره، ایزدبانو «آناهیتا» بدون هرگونه رزم‌افزار نگاریده شده است. با نرسه، اتفاق خاصی در چگونگی حمل شمشیر برروی سکه‌ها دیده نمی‌شود؛ سکه‌های وی از این دید، می‌تواند نوعی پیروی از سکه‌های بهرام اول معرفی شود. با وجود این، هرمزد دوم و شاپور دوم در نقش‌رستم فاقد هر گونه شمشیر نگاریده شده‌اند.

آشکارا، با خسرو اول (انوشیروان)، شاهد تغییراتی در شیوهٔ حمل شمشیر برروی سکه‌ها هستیم. بر پشت سکهٔ وی، ملازم سمت چپ با قرار دادن عمودوار شمشیر در سمت چپ بدن، اما با بند حامل آن را به کمر خود نگه‌داشته است؛ ملازم سمت راست، شمشیر را در سمت راست بدن خود حمل می‌نماید، درحالی‌که دست راست خود را بر دستهٔ آن نگه‌داشته است.

اردشیر دوم و شاپور سوم در تاق‌بستان

اردشیر دوم در تاق‌بستان دارای شمشیری با تک‌بند حامل در سمت چپ بدن خود است؛ او به‌گونه‌ای دست چپ خود را بر شمشیر گذاشته و فشار می‌دهد که گویی دچار زاویهٔ مورب شده است. شاپور سوم نیز دارای شمشیری دو دسته‌ای با نگاهداشت دو دستان خود برروی دستهٔ آن دیده می‌شود.

خسرو دوم

خسرو پرویز در نگارهٔ تاج‌ستانی، دارای شمشیری دو دسته‌ای است که در وسط بدن نگاهداشته و با تک‌بند حامل به کمر پیوست می‌باشد. این شمشیر دارای محافظی بزرگ، کیلون‌های رو به پایین (شمشیر) و دستهٔ بلند است. با وجود این، در نگارهٔ شکار که شاه با کمان به تیراندازی مشغول است، خسرو با شمشیری با دو بند حامل پیوسته به بدن دیده می‌شود. بر روی سکه‌های خسرو دوم، ملازمان هر دو، شمشیری را در وسط بدن خود نگه‌داشته‌اند که نوع شمشیر «غلاف‌دار با بند حامل» نام دارد. هر دو ملازم، دستان چپ خود را بر روی غلاف نزدیک قبضه نگه‌داشته‌اند. این شیوه، با سرنگونی شاهنشاهی ساسانی، از سوی شاهان تبرستان نیز حفظ شد.

نتیجه‌گیری

شمشیرهای ساسانی یکی از مهم‌ترین میراث جنگی این دوره است. شمشیرهای ساسانی در آغاز بازتابی از شمشیر اشکانی بود که اندک‌اندک به‌شکل ساسانی‌شدگی درآمد. شمشیرهای ساسانی، بر پایهٔ آثار باستان‌شناختی، در حالت حمل: الف) در وسط بدن از روبه‌رو، ب) یاد در یکی از سمت‌های راست یا چپ، بدن دیده می‌شوند. این روزم‌افزار بدو شکل حمل می‌شده است: الف) با تک‌بند حامل که از یک‌سو به غلاف و از سوی دیگر به بدن (کمر) متصل می‌شده است. ب) با دو بند حامل که این شکل، به گمانی مخصوص موقعیت‌های ویژه بوده و کاربرد کمتری از آن بر روی سکه‌ها، نقش‌برجسته‌ها تا به آثار زرین و سیمن دیده می‌شود. شمشیرهای ساسانی دارای تنوع قابل‌توجهی چون تک‌دسته، دستهٔ کوتاه، دستهٔ بلند، دو دسته، Pشکل با تیغه‌های بلند، کوتاه و متوسط بوده‌اند.