



BAHRĀM (VĀRƏΘRAΓNA) II. REPRESENTATION IN IRANIAN ART

ii. Representation in Iranian Art

Art representations of Bahrām, the god of victory, reflect the perception of his being as understood through religious and mythological data of various periods. He is represented in different forms throughout the centuries of Iranian art according to prevailing norms and art styles of each period. During the Seleucid, Parthian, and early Sasanian periods he is depicted as the Greek Herakles, a naked male figure holding a club manifesting physical strength. Later in the Sasanian period, the deity is pictured as the victorious fire of the Sasanians, *ātaš ī Wahrām* (see *ātaš*) on seals and coins and as different animal incarnations enumerated in *Yašt* 14 and represented in Sasanian art.

The life-size rock sculpture of Herakles carved beside the main east-west highway at Bīsotūn near Kermānšāh may reflect the fact that the Iranian god was the patron divinity of travelers. He is there shown in a reclining position holding a goblet in his left hand; his club is by his feet, and a lion skin is outlined on the rock below. An inscription dates the sculpture to 163 of the Seleucid era, i.e., 148 b.c. (Georgina Herrmann, *The Iranian Revival*, Oxford, 1977, p. 31; M. Boyce, "Iconoclasm among the Zoroastrians," in *Christianity, Judaism and other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, ed. J.



Neusner, Leiden, 1975, p. 100). A shrine of Herakles has been identified at Masjed(-e) Solaymān and a stone statue found there shows the god grasping the Nemean lion (Roman Ghirshman, “La terrasse sacrée de Masjid-i-Solaiman,” *Comptes rendus de l’Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, 1969, p. 484). Figurines of Herakles have been found in the ruins of Seleucia on the Tigris (W. Von Ingen, *Figurines from Seleucia on the Tigris*, Ann Arbor, 1939, pp. 106-08, pl. XVIII), at Susa (Herrmann, op. cit., p. 39), sculptures at Palmyra and Dura-Europos (S. Downey, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos*, Final Report, III/1, fasc. 1: *The Heracles Sculpture*, New York, 1969), and stele of Assur (W. Andrae, *Das wiedererstandene Assur*, Leipzig, 1938, p. 175, pl. 80d). At the site of Nimrud Dagh, Bahrām is equated with Herakles in sculptures and inscriptions of Mithradates Kallinikos and in those of his son Antiochus, dated to the first century b.c. Figures of syncretistic Iranian and Greek gods are represented next to the figure of Antiochus on each side of his funerary mound. One of the gods is identified by an inscription as Artagnes-Herakles-Ares (Helmut Waldmann, *Die kommagenischen Kultformen unter König Mithradates I. Kallinikos und seinem Sohn Antiochus I*, Leiden, 1973, pp. 8ff., 36ff.). An image of Herakles has been noted next to a row of figures on a rock in the Šimbār valley in Elymais, dated to a.d. 100 (M. A. R. Colledge, *Parthian Art*, New York, 1977, p. 92).

In the early Sasanian period Bahrām is still represented as the Greek Herakles. In the investiture relief of Ardašīr I at Naqš-e Rājab III, one of the two small figures facing each other inserted between the figures of Ahura Mazdā and the king is Bahrām. He is represented in the nude and holding a club in his right hand and a lion’s skin in his left hand (Louis Vanden Berghe, *Reliefs rupestres de l’Iran ancien*, Brussels, 1984, pp. 126-27, fig. 9). Perhaps Bahrām the god is the patron deity of the future Sasanian king Bahrām I, the other small figure in the relief pictured as facing him and paying homage to him. It is significant that five Sasanian kings were named after this deity.

It is during the Sasanian period that *wahrām* is noted as the generic name of the principal fires. According to J. Duchesne-Guillemin it may be the Bahrām fire that is represented by the throne-altar seen on the reverse of certain coins, and by the head in the altar flames of others (“Zoroastrian Religion,” *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/2, p. 903). In the *Dādistān ī dēnīg* 31.7 it is stated that Bahrām is seen in the fire (E. W. West, *Pahlavi Texts*, SBE 18, Delhi, 1965, p. 65).

The bird on an altar depicted on a Sasanian intaglio (*Survey of Persian Art*, 2nd ed., Tokyo, 1964, pl. 255T) represents Bahrām, for the falcon is his bird (J.



Duchesne-Guillemin, op. cit., p. 903). Moreover wings on the crowns of Sasanian kings derive from a bird of prey associated with Bahrām. This emblem signified the special relationship between the king and his patron deity Bahrām. It is first seen on the crown of Bahrām II who bears the god's name and is later copied by King Pērōz whose name means victorious, as well as King Ƙosrow Parwēz also bearing victory in his name (Kurt Erdmann, "Die Entwicklung der sasanidischen Krone," *Ars Islamica* 5, 1951, p. 87 n.4).

Boar and eagle heads on the caps of crown princes also symbolize this deity (R. Göbl, "Sasanian Coins," *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/1, pp. 326-27). Boar figures are widespread in Sasanian art and occur in stucco and on silver, textiles, and seals (Kurt Erdmann, "Eberdarstellung und Ebersymbolik in Iran," *Bonner Jahrbücher* 147, 1942, pp. 345-83). It has been argued that this figure represents Bahrām in his most ferocious aspect, for in this form he accompanies Mithra in *Yašt* 10.70; and in his own *Yašt* 14.15 his strength as a powerful attacking boar is well emphasized (E. Benveniste et L. Renou, *Vr̥tra et Vr̥θragna*, Paris, 1934, pp. 34ff.). Probably the boar motif on the seal which is stated by Moses of Kalankatouc' and by Faustus of Byzantium to constitute the seal of the state is a figuration of Bahrām (M. K. Patkanian, "Essai d'une histoire de la dynastie des Sassanides d'après les renseignements fournis par les historiens arméniens," *JA* 7, 1866, p. 113). Other animal motifs on Sasanian seals have also been identified as possible avatars of Bahrām (Christopher J. Brunner, *Sasanian Stamp Seals in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, 1978, pp. 78, 92, 102, 104).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text. See also the general works Christensen, *Iran Sass.* R. Ghirshman, *Iran, Parthians and Sasanians*, London, 1962.

R. Göbl, *Sasanidische Numismatik*, Brunswick, 1968.

E. Herzfeld, *Iran in the Ancient East*, Oxford, 1941.

J. Kröger, *Sasanidischer Stückdekor*, Mainz, 1982.

V. Lukonin, *Persia II*, London, 1971.