



## BARGOSTVĀN

**BARGOSTVĀN**, armor, specifically horse armor, a distinctive feature of Iranian warfare from very early times on. The earliest known chamfron has been excavated at Ḥasanlū from a 9th-century B.C. stratum (M. A. Littauer and J. H. Crouvel, "Ancient Iranian Horse Helmets?" *Iranica Antiqua* 19, 1984, pp. 41-52 pl. VIII, esp. pp. 48-49). Evidence for horse defenses made from iron ringlets, however, appears considerably later at Dura Europos. The site, within the sphere of Iranian influence, has been dated by R. Ghirshman (*Parthes et Sassanides*, Paris, 1962, pl. 63, p. 52) and others to second and third century A.D. A rough sketch on a wall distinctly depicts a horseman in combined mail and lame body armor mounted on a war horse in a mail caparison. Later, in the fifth or late sixth to early seventh century A.D., depending on which date is given to the rock relief at Ṭāq-e Bostān near Kermānšāh (Bākṭarān, *ibid.*, pp. 192-93 and pl. 235), we have a unique instance in antiquity of a king in full armor mounting a horse wearing what appears to be a heavy defense (made of iron ringlets?) covered by a layer of fabric of sorts, with tassels.

In early Islamic times the word *bargost(o)vān* seems to have referred essentially to chain-mail defenses. Its earliest entry in a Persian dictionary, the 8th/14th century *Ṣeḥāḥ al-fors* by Moḥammad b. Hendūšāh Naḵjavānī (2nd ed., 'A.-'A. Ṭā'atī, Tehran, 2535 = 1355 Š./1976, p. 233) loosely defines it as "a defense [Persian *pūšeš*, used with that specialized meaning] thrown on horses in wartime." But early poetry is more informative. In the *Šāh-nāma*, its invention is attributed to Jamšēd in a passage praising his ability to make iron soft "by Kayanian glory" (*be-farr-e kayī*; ed. Mohl, I, p. 39; Moscow, I, p. 39). It is



frequently associated with the *jowšan*, which we know to be a coat of mail. When Gēv leaves the battlefield after defeating the Turanians, their *bargostvāns* are ripped apart (*čāk-čāk*, used of iron, not fabric; *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Mohl, III, p. 202).

In pitched battle the way to deal with the *bargostvān* is to use a *kaḍang* wood arrow. As Hajīr shoots a volley of such arrows at Andarīmān, one of them goes through the saddle and the *bargostvān*, killing the horse (*ibid.*, III, p. 546). Farroḳī Sīstānī (*Dīvān*, ed. M. Dabīrsiāqī, Tehran, 1349 Š./1970, p. 334, vv. 6729-30) compares the asters with “. . . silver studs which for the sake of fiery battle / Are stuck on the bluish ringlets (*ḡeybahā*) of the *bargostvān*.” ‘Onṣorī at about the same time (ed. M. Dabīrsiāqī, Tehran, 1342 Š./1963, p. 253 v. 2382) writes these punning lines: “How would water stay in a sieve? So do stay/His arrows in the ringlets of the coat of mail (*jowšan*) and the *bargostvān*.” ‘Abd-al-Wāse‘ Jabalī, who died in 555/1160, coined this vivid image showing that the ringlets could still be left apparent in his day: “Until the moment when from so much blood on the body of his Šabdēz (name of Ḳosrow II’s mount in the *Šāh-nāma*)/The ringlets of the *bargostvān* became studded with garnets” (‘Abd-al-Wāse‘ Jabalī, *Dīvān*, ed. D. Šafā, I, *Qaṣāyed*, Tehran, 1339 Š./1960, p. 301, where it is incorrectly noted; accurate version in Sorūrī, *Majma‘ al-fors*, ed. M. Dabīrsiāqī, 3 vols., Tehran, 1338 Š./1959, I, p. 183). A famous line by Sa‘dī confirms that chain mail *bargostvān*, which continued to be associated with the *jowšan*, was in common use in the 7th/13th century: “As for thee, thou art in no need of *jowšan* and *bargostvān*/On battle day, thou wrapst thyself in the mail [*zereh*] of the hair” (*Ġazalīyāt-e Sa‘dī*, ed. M. ‘A. Forūḡī, Tehran, 1342 Š./1963, p. 16).

It is difficult to ascertain at which stage a second type of *bargostvān* made of iron lames joined with mail and a variant made of iron scales appeared in Iran. The evidence of literary metaphors shows that they were in use at least as early as the 6th/12th century. When describing animals the anonymous author of the *Sendbād-nāma* (quoted under *bargostvān* by Dehḳodā) remarks that “the fish does not don [its] mail garment [*zereh*] nor the tortoise [its] *bargostvān*” in reference to the scale-like appearance of mail and the lamellar pattern of tortoise shell with its deep grooves separating roughly rectangular patches. The image recurs in the mid-8th/14th century in a panegyric to Shaikh AbūEshāq, the ruler of Fārs: “And for fear of your might, in the depths of the Indian Ocean—The fish forever wears [its] mail garment [*zereh*] and the tortoise its *bargostvān*” (‘Obayd Zākānī, *Kollīyāt*, ed. ‘A. Eqbāl, Tehran, 1352



Š./1963, p. 14). It is this lamellar type of horse armor that Giosafat Barbaro (q.v.), the Venetian ambassador to the court of Uzun Ḥasan, describes in a passage to which attention was drawn (with incorrect identification of the shah) by Hans Stöcklein (*Survey of Persian Art* VI, p. 2560, citing W. Thomas, translator of J. Barbaro and A. Contarini, *Travels to Tana and Persia*, London, 1873, p. 66).

The two types would appear to have been used concurrently, judging from literature as well as miniature painting (on which see below). However, the lamellar type alone survives through a handful of specimens in Istanbul, Paris (Musée de l'Armée), New York (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), and Bern (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Charlottenfels) which have been assigned various dates (14th, 15th, 16th century) and provenances, ranging from Iran and Turkey to Mamluk Egypt. A systematic study of the extant material (some of which is composite, as those in The Metropolitan Museum) must be undertaken before putting forward any regional attributions.

A fourth type of *bargostvān* was constructed on the same lines as the *kažāgand*—a defense only recently identified (A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, “The Westward Journey of the Kazhagand,” *The Arms and Armour Society* 12/1, June, 1983, pp. 8-35), mail covered with silk waste (Persian *kaj/kaž*) glued on and concealed from sight by brocaded silk (*dibā*) with a silk lining inside. The full name *bargostvān-e kajīn* or *kažīn*, literally “the silk-waste *bargostvān*,” was commonly shortened to either *bargostvān* or *kajīm*. The latter form is entered by Jamāl-al-Dīn Ḥosayn Enjū Šīrāzī in the *Farhang-e jahāngīrī* (ed. R. ‘Afīfī, 3 vols., Mašhad, 1351 Š./1972-1354 Š./1975, I, p. 715) as “*bargostvān* padded inside with silk waste.” Under *gāyba* (ibid., II, p. 2323), the lexicographer specified that it is used for making *kajīm*. It is to this type that references such as Bayhaqī’s in the 5th/11th century may apply. When describing elephants in the Ghaznavid army, the Iranian historian mentions “the males with brocade *bargostvāns* . . .” (*Tārīk-e Bayhaqī*, ed. Adīb, p. 424, quoted by Dehḵodā). Things had not substantially changed on 21 Rajab 823/28 July 1420 when, in the battle opposing the Timurid army of Šāhroḵ and the Turkmen led by Qarā Yūsof, the former had “war elephants equipped with (their) armament and *kajīm*” (Ḥasan Rūmlū [Tehran], p. 128). A serious investigation has yet to be conducted through book painting to determine whether statistical evidence points to prevalence of any one type at a given time and, perhaps, in a given area. From a survey of the limited number of combat scenes adequately reproduced in color, it is clear that different types would be used simultaneously. In



a double page from a *Zafar-nāma* described by authors as having been painted at Shiraz in 1436 (this writer has not seen the colophon) a *bargostvān* made of iron scales is mounted by Tīmūr, while the horses of an amir charging on and two other warriors wear defenses made from iron lames (*The Treasures of Islam*, Geneva, 1985, p. 59). In a *Šāh-nāma* page from a manuscript said to have been illustrated in Gilān in 1494 (*ibid.*, p. 63), scale armor may be seen on one horse. Lamellar horse defenses, constructed like the lamellar cuirasses (*der*) worn by horsemen, also appear. Thirty years or so later, the *Šāh-nāma* executed for Shah Ṭahmāsb includes some very precise representations of lamellar horse defenses (*ibid.*, pl. 52.1; 53.4), as well as of quilted defenses, stiff and heavy (with chain mail sewn inside or padding only?). Some other representations show shaped pieces of (varnished?) material that is likely to be highly resistant rhinoceros (*karg*) from which leather horse armor mentioned in Persian literature was made. The body of textual and visual evidence of which these are but selected examples makes it clear that the *bargostvān* played an important role in Iranian military tradition from pre-Islamic times down to the Safavid period. The value set upon horse defenses may be inferred from these lines in Šaraf-al-Dīn Bedlīsī's *Šaraf-nāma* (V. Veliamine-Zernof, ed., *Scheref-Nameh ou histoire des Kourdes par Scheref, prince de Bidlis*, St. Petersburg, 1862, II [Persian], p. 252): "At the time when Shah Esmā'īl (II) entrusted this writer with inspecting the treasury (*kazīna*), the central reserve (*bayt-al-māl*), and the other possessions of the late shah (Ṭahmāsb), there were in the armory . . . the arms and outfit (*asleḥa wa yarāq*) for thirty thousand horsemen, consisting of cuirasses (*jobba*), coats of mail (*jowšan*), *kajīm*, and *bargostvān*."

J. W. Allan's recent assertion (*Persian Metal Technology 700-1300 A.D.*, Oxford, 1979, p. 96) à propos of "horse-armor" (Persian *bargostvān*, Arabic *tajāfīf* [*sic*]; the writer inexplicably uses the plural of Arabic *tijfāf*) to the effect that "the emphasis on speed and mobility in the Islamic period probably led this item of equipment to fall into disuse in Iran: there are certainly very few references to horse-armor in Iran after the [Arab] conquests (though see Fakhr-i Mudabbir [*sic*] pp. 216, 260-1)" cannot be maintained, considering the multiple evidence of Iranian lexicography, poetry, history, and book painting to the contrary.

See also [armor](#); [asb](#).



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