



CLOTHING IV. IN THE SASANIAN PERIOD

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Female dress

Investigation of female dress in the Sasanian period (224-651 c.e.) is hampered by the small number of preserved representations of women relative to those of men.

Ordinary women's dress. The dress worn by females who were neither royal nor divine consisted of a long tunic derived from the Greek *chiton*, either unbelted with long sleeves or sleeveless and girt below the breast. This costume appeared as early as the reign of Šāpūr I (241-72) in the mosaics of *Bīšāpūr* (Ghirshman, 1956, frontispiece and pls. VII/1, V/1). A veil worn over the sleeved tunic, draped around the lower body and passing over the left shoulder (Ghirshman, 1962, p. 142 fig. 181), appears to have been a descendant of the Greek *himation*, later adopted by Roman matrons (Ghirshman, 1956, p. 66); it was worn either fastened at the shoulder or pulled over the head (Bieber, pp. 27, 29; Richter, p. 91). The version of this costume depicted at *Bīšāpūr* had its immediate antecedents in the long tunic and veil worn by powerful and wealthy women of the 2nd and 3rd centuries c.e., as depicted on Parthian and Palmyrene monuments (Peck, p. 107; Colledge, 1976, p. 149, pls.



61, 62, 85, 89; MacKay, pl. LVII/i; Ghirshman, 1962, p. 95 fig. 106; Kawami, pls. 63, 64; for comparable dress among the contemporary Kushans, see Ingholt, 1957, pls. 189, 310; Rosenfield, pls. 98, 98a). It was still popular in the 6th and 7th centuries (attested on silver plates in the Guennol and Arthur M. Sackler collections, where the fabrics are patterned with triple circles, stippled triangles, and trellis designs; Harper, 1981, pl. 38; idem, 1978, pl. 25).

A variation of the veiled tunic is seen on a series of silver-gilt vases and ewers depicting female dancers and generally dated to the 5th and 6th centuries. Their iconographic significance has been variously interpreted (Trever, 1967, p. 126; Harper, 1971, p. 508; idem, 1978; Grabar, pp. 63-68; Ghirshman 1953, pp. 57-59; idem, 1957, p. 77; Shepherd, pp. 82-88; Carter, p. 61). In these images the veil, instead of being worn over the shoulder, is draped below the hips, with its ends wrapped around the arms, thus revealing a clinging, diaphanous belted tunic with long sleeves, sometimes patterned with circles or triple dots ([plate lxix](#); Lukonin, pls. 183, 185, 189; Harper, 1978, pl. 18; Trever, pl. XXVIII; Ghirshman, 1962, p. 215 fig. 256; Grabar, pls. 19, 20). The shoulders of one tunic are decorated with roundels enclosing dotted rosettes, a feature more commonly found on earlier male garments (Lukonin, pls. 186-89). Prudence Harper has traced this dress to 2nd- and 3rd-century costume of the eastern Mediterranean (1971, p. 513). Dancers and other women of lower rank did not wear beaded necklaces, but rather heavy collars with single, double, or triple pendants ([plate lxix](#); Lukonin, pls. 181-89; Harper, 1978, pl. 18; Trever, pls. XXV-XXVIII; Ghirshman, p. 215 fig. 256; Grabar, pls. 19, 20, 22).

The tunic and veil were still worn at the end of the Sasanian period, as is clear from the depiction of female harpists in the Boar Hunt relief at Tāq-e Bostān (reign of Kōsrow II, 591-628). The veil, which is draped over the left shoulder with the ends hanging behind or folded on the shoulder, is decorated on the upper thigh with a rosette enclosed in a jeweled border ([plate lxx](#), [plate lxxi](#); Peck, pls. IXb, X-XII; Fukai and Horiuchi, I, pls. LIX, LXIX). The tunic is patterned with rosettes. The bodice closes down the front, where parallel bands disappear under the veil, and there is a high collar with rosettes or button forms, probably fasteners ([plates lxx](#), [lxxi](#)). The harpists also wear heavy torques with rosette pendants ([plate lxx](#); Fukai and Horiuchi, I, pls. LXIX, LXX, LIX a-b; Peck, pls. IXb, X, XI), which are comparable to the plainer, more massive torques worn by men in the Parthian period (Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 86 fig. 98, 88 fig. 99, 89 fig. 100, 94 fig. 105, 99 fig. 110). Wide cuffs adorned with rosettes and birds recall the pairs of heavy bracelets worn by Palmyrene



women (represented on funerary reliefs of the 3rd century; MacKay, fig. 6a, pls. LVII/2, LVIII) and the embroidered and jeweled cuffs of their coats (Ingholt, 1928, pl. XVc). High collars with central fastenings appear in no other Sasanian representations and can be compared only to elements of the caftan, a fitted coat with long sleeves, worn by a prince in a 3rd-century Kushan sculpture from Surkh Kotal (Sorḵ Kotal) in Afghanistan (Schlumberger, pl. VI).

The harpists at Tāq-e Bostān, though damaged, provide rare evidence for head coverings worn by Sasanian women of the lower ranks; most other depictions are of queens or deities. Two of them wear soft turbans (plate lxx; Peck, pls. IXb, X; Fukai and Horiuchi, I, pls. LXIX, LXX) reminiscent of those worn by female musicians on a 3rd-century Gandharan relief from Peshawar (Ingholt, 1957, pl. 38). Two other harpists wear rectangular headdresses with wide pendant bands of cloth or ribbon embroidered with panels in a repeat design (Peck, fig. 2; Fukai and Horiuchi, I, pls. LIX, LXIX). Their hair, plaited and tied with beads, recalls the hairstyle of the small figure on a plate in the Guennol collection (Harper, 1981, pl. 38). A third rectangular hat is constructed with two narrow bands joined at the back in a bow with decorated ribbon ends (plate lxx; Peck, pl. XI; Fukai and Horiuchi, I, pl. LXXI). Similar hats with long ornamented ribbons are worn by female donors on wall paintings of the 6-7th centuries at Ming Ōi near Qizil in Chinese Turkestan (Le Coq, 1924, p. 19, pl. VIII). The closest parallels for all the harpists' headdresses are thus found in the east, in Gandhara and Central Asia/Chinese Turkestan.

Royal dress. The tunic and veil were, as Ghirshman noted, appropriate dress only for noblewomen and court musicians and dancers (1956, p. 65). The dress depicted on royal women and goddesses in Sasanian Persia seems to have differed, though the limited material available makes generalization difficult. At Naqš-e Rājab there is an early representation of a queen, probably *Dēnag*, wife of Ardašīr I (224-41), wearing a heavy robe like a coat, similar to that worn by male figures. Another type of royal dress soon became characteristic, however (Herrmann, 1969, pp. 68 fig. 3, 69, pl. III). In the rock reliefs of Bahrām II (276-93) at Sar Mašhad, Sarāb-e Qandīl (also known as Tang-e Qandīl), and *Barm-e Delak* female figures, probably representations of Queen Šāpūrduxtak (Harper, 1981, p. 34 n. 36), wear floating robes rendered in the classical "wet drapery" style, though the hair styles and headdresses differ. A diaphanous long-sleeved robe is girt at the waist by a ribboned belt. A light cloak floats from the shoulders to the knees; in some instances it is secured at the breast by a clasp consisting of two circles with pendant pleated ribbons. A



necklace of beads encircles the neck (Ghirshman, 1962, p. 175 fig. 217; Hinz, 1969, pls. 131, 135; idem, 1973, pls. 46, 48; Harper, 1981, p. 34 fig. 9; Frye, 1974, pls. II-IVa). On the unfinished relief at Naqš-e Rostam a figure, probably also to be identified as Šāpūrduxtak, seems to wear a similar mantle and a necklace of round gems, as she does in a portrait bust on the silver Zargveshi cup in the Museum for the History of Ethnography of Georgia, Tbilisi (Ghirshman, 1962, p. 169 fig. 212; Harper, 1981, p. 30; Lukonin, pl. 207). A seal of Dēnag and another that may portray the wife of Šāpūr I demonstrate that at the beginning of the Sasanian period the collar of large round stones was already part of the parure of a royal lady (Lukonin, p. 216, pl. 59; Ghirshman, 1962, p. 241 fig. 294). The necklace and cloak continued as marks of royalty in the reign of Narseh I (293-302), both appearing on the portrait bust of a queen on a silver bowl in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Harper, 1981, p. 38, pl. 5), and the necklace in a depiction of a royal lady on a vessel in the Iran Bastan Museum in Tehran (Harper, 1981, pp. 37, 39, pl. 7). Although the mantle, like the long tunic, may ultimately have been derived from Hellenistic prototypes as transformed by Parthian and Syrian fashion (Colledge, 1976, pls. 63, 68, 91, 93), its shape and its fastening are particularly characteristic of Sasanian dress; in Palmyrene representations the beaded necklace is usually found in conjunction with other collars (Colledge, 1976, pls. 68, 86, 89, 91, 93).

Divine dress. The goddess [Anāhīd](#) is dressed as a Sasanian queen in the Investiture relief of Narseh at Naqš-e Rostam ([plate lxxii](#); Ghirshman, 1962, p. 176 fig. 218; Vanden Berghe, pl. 32). She is clad in a filmy sleeved tunic tied with a ribbon belt, her cloak secured by a clasp of two circles and pleated ribbons. A necklace of round gems encircles her throat. In a unique 5th-century stucco image of Anāhīd from Kish, in Mesopotamia, she wears a heavy collar with pendants similar to those of women of lower rank (Harper, 1978, pl. 42). At the end of the Sasanian period another variant of the divine female dress appears in the investiture relief of Kōsrow II at Tāq-e Bostān. There the goddess Anāhīd wears an outer veil draped over the left shoulder in the fashion of the female harpists' dress but worn here for the first time by a divine being ([plate lxxiii](#); Fukai and Horiuchi, II, pls. XX, XXI). Double strands of beads encircle the neck and wrists of the robe, also a modification of earlier fashions. Instead of the royal cloak with clasps a heavy, smooth coat with long sleeves is draped over the shoulders like a mantle, in the manner of Achaemenid male figures in the reliefs at Persepolis (see ii, above) and of female representations in Scythian art (Knauer, figs. 13-15). Anāhīd is represented on one of the capitals from Tāq-e Bostān wearing the more



conventional cloak with a roundel at the shoulder (Herzfeld p. 330 fig. 413), though on another capital she seems to wear a heavy coat (Ghirshman, 1962, p. 292 fig. 376). This coat, perhaps lined with fur, is trimmed with a double row of beads and square gems and edged at cuff and shoulders by stepped bands of striated design and jewel-like disks (Fukai and Horiuchi, II, pls. XX, XXI, XXVII–XXX, XXXIIIb). The stepped bands at the shoulders enclose roundels containing star rosettes, recalling slightly earlier shoulder designs on the robe of a dancer (Fukai and Horiuchi, II, pl. XXVII), and the surface is patterned with roundels enclosing rosettes, each with four heart-shaped petals (Fukai and Horiuchi, II, pls. XXVII, XXI). Georgina Thompson has cited the Avestan hymn to Anāhitā (Yt. 5; see [ābān yašt](#)), in which her typically rich costume is described as made of 300 beaver skins (1965, p. 121; cf. beaver). Heavy, decorated women’s coats can be traced to the 3rd century at Palmyra, where they are worn in the conventional manner, rather than thrown over the shoulders, and covered by veils (Colledge, 1976, pl. 92). Although the relief of Dēnag at Naqš-e Rostam is evidence that coats were worn in the early Sasanian period, they were soon abandoned, only to reappear toward the end of the period.

In the Tāq-e Bostān relief Anāhīd’s robe does not cover her feet as it does in other representations, and it is possible to see that she wears soft slippers decorated at the insteps with double ovoid jewels (Fukai and Horiuchi, II, pl. XXXIII); this ornament is richer than those in Parthian and Palmyrene depictions (Colledge, 1977, pls. 13b, 47; Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 78 fig. 90, 95 fig. 106).

Male dress

3rd-4th centuries. The earliest representations of Sasanian male dress date from the reign of Ardašīr I (226-41); they are found at Fīrūzābād, Naqš-e Rostam, and Naqš-e Rostam. The king, his god, and the accompanying courtiers are all clad in heavy, smooth tunics shaped like coats, which fall to the knees over trousers (Herrmann, 1969, pp. 68 fig. 3, 70 fig. 4, pls. II, III, IV); that of the king at Naqš-e Rostam has elaborately folded sleeves (a style peculiar to this relief; [plate lxxiv](#)). This type of heavy tunic was worn in slightly different forms throughout the Sasanian period and had a long tradition in Persia and western Asia. It was descended from the [candys](#) of Achaemenid times (6th-4th centuries b.c.e.), described by Xenophon in the *Cyropaedia* (1.3.2., 8.1.40, 8.3.10) as a long Median coat draped over the shoulders with pendant sleeves, except when worn by the cavalry during royal inspection (G. Thompson, p. 122). When combined with a shorter tunic and trousers it was fastened by



cords or lappets at the breast (Ghirshman, 1964, pp. 157, 158 fig. 209; *Survey of Persian Art* IV, pl. 108A-B). This fashion was probably brought into northwestern Persia by the Medes at the end of the early 1st millennium b.c.e. (Knauer, p. 23; see ii, above). In the 1st century b.c.e., at Nimrud Dagħ, the Persian ancestors of Antiochus I were represented in embroidered fur-lined coats, without pendant sleeves, tied at the breast with ribbons and two circular clasps (Knauer, fig. 18). The nomadic Parthians and Kushans adopted this attire in the 2nd and 3rd centuries c.e. (Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 78 fig. 90, 89 fig. 100; Kawami, pl. 26; Rostovtzeff, 1938, pl. XXIII; Rosenfield, pls. 2, 23, 94, 98a; see iii, above), and it is not surprising that the Sasanians wore it in their turn. The earliest Sasanian depictions of this coat are in two graffiti at Persepolis showing Bābak (Pāpak), father of Ardašīr I, and another royal figure clad in long quilted coats tied with ribbons at the breast and ornamented at the shoulders with radial medallions (Herzfeld, p. 309 fig. 402; Harper, 1978, p. 123 fig. N). This shoulder decoration had a long history on both male and female clothing in Sasanian Persia. A lighter variation of the coat was worn open over a long tunic and leggings, though fastened at the breast with circular clasps and sometimes tied with ribbons. It was favored by courtiers and princes and appears on reliefs of Šāpūr I and Bahrām II, as well as on metalwork of the 3rd century (Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 153-54 fig. 196, 169-70 fig. 212; Herrmann, 1969, pl. VIII; Harper, 1978, pl. 88), but it seems to have gone out of fashion by the early 4th century. The fastening, consisting of two circular clasps and ribbons, is close in form to those at Nimrud Dagħ (Rosenfield, pl. 152).

The most common types of headdress for Sasanian nobles also made their appearance in the early years of the empire. They were the rounded tall hat, with or without neck guards, borrowed from royal Parthian fashion, and the soft “Phrygian” cap, with a point falling forward; both styles were sometimes tied with long fillets or decorated with devices of rank (Kawami, pls. 26, 30; Colledge, 1977, pls. 13/a, 29, 38/k, 38/u, 38/w, 47/a; Ghirshman, 1962, p. 90 fig. 102). These two headdresses, the pointed cap sometimes ending in the head of a bird or animal, were worn by nobles and princes (and queens) in scenes of investiture and victory on reliefs dating from the period of Ardašīr I through the reign of Šāpūr II (309-79; [plate lxxv](#); Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 131 fig. 167, 132 fig. 168, 153-54 fig. 196, 158 fig. 200, 161 fig. 205, 169-70 fig. 212, 172 fig. 214, 173 fig. 215, 176 fig. 218, 184 fig. 225; Herrmann, 1969, pls. III, VIII, XI, XIIA, XVI). The appearance of these headdresses on silver “hunting” plates and on late seal portraits demonstrates their continued widespread use in the later Sasanian period (Harper, 1981, pp. 50, 51, pl. 9; Frye, 1973, D.a, D.2, D.91, D.93,



D.101, D.103).

In early Sasanian Persia royal and divine male figures, like queens and goddesses, almost invariably were depicted wearing the light cloak secured in front with ribbons and clasps; it was clearly associated with power and authority. At Naqš-e Rostam Ardašīr I and the god Ohrmazd are shown in cloaks of soft material secured at the breast with short ribbons over their stiff coats ([plate lxxvi](#); Herrmann, 1969, p. 70 fig. 4, pl. IV). This cloak was probably a descendant of the Greek himation (Houston, p. 174); a short version pinned at the right shoulder was adopted by wealthy Palmyrenes in the 2nd and 3rd centuries (Colledge, 1976, pls. 61, 66). Although Geo Widengren (p. 240) has traced the Sasanian cloak fastened in front by a clasp to that worn by the Achaemenids, it more closely recalls the early 3rd-century mantle of Parthian Elymais, which was longer, ornamented, and also fastened in front with an elaborate clasp (Vanden Berghe, pl. 15; see iii, above). In the early years of the Sasanian dynasty the royal cloak was worn with a broad jeweled collar (identified by Herrmann as a chain of office; 1969, p. 85, pls. XIA, XIII, p. 84 fig. 10; Vanden Berghe, pl. 22). The flat jewels or disks of which it is composed recall Parthian neck ornaments worn by male figures at Dura Europus in the 2nd and 3rd centuries (Rostovtzeff, 1938, p. 97 fig. 10).

On rock reliefs dating from the reign of Ardašīr I through that of Ardašīr II (379-83; Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 126 fig. 164, 127-30 fig. 165, 132 fig. 168, 153-54 fig. 196, 169-70 fig. 212, 176 fig. 218, 184 fig. 225, 190 fig. 233; Herrmann, 1969, pls. III, VIII, XI, XIA) the collar, plain or adorned, was worn by royal, divine, and noble figures. Beginning in the reign of Šāpūr I it was replaced in most royal representations on reliefs by a necklace of round gems or pearls ([plate lxxvii](#)), which became the familiar mark of royalty, worn also by the queen. The high priest Kirdēr (Kartīr), active from Šāpūr I to Wahrām II, is depicted at Naqš-e Rostam clad in the pearl necklace and the cloak fastened with double clasp and pleated ribbons otherwise reserved for royal and divine figures, a mark of his exceptional power (Ghirshman, 1962, p. 161 fig. 205). The beaded necklace continued to be worn by royalty until the fall of the dynasty (for depictions on reliefs, coins, and silver vessels, see Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 135 fig. 171, 155 fig. 197, 165 fig. 209, 167 fig. 211, 171 fig. 213, 174 fig. 216, 176 fig. 218, 190 fig. 233, 208 fig. 248, 246 fig. 309, 247 figs. 310-13, 250, figs. 315-19; Harper, 1981, pls. 10, 15, 37). From the end of the 5th century, however, it was sometimes replaced by a heavy collar with two rows of beads and central pendants (Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 224 fig. 267, 225 fig. 269, 251 fig. 329; Fukai



and Horiuchi, II, pls. VII, XV; Harper, 1978, pl. 41; idem, 1981, pls. 22, 27, 38).

Aside from the mantle and jeweled necklace the dress of the king consisted of a short tunic bloused at the waist above trousers of a filmy, clinging material with pleated ribbons. A ribbon belt with round clasps completed the outfit. This quintessentially Sasanian royal garb was identified for the first time on the reliefs at Dārābgerd (dated by Herrmann, 1969, pp. 65, 83-87, to the end of Ardašīr I's reign; for attributions to Šāpūr I, see p. 65 nn. 11-13, 15). It was worn in depictions of both kings and gods and, once developed and codified under Šāpūr I, became standard royal attire in representations on rock reliefs and "hunting" plates until late in the 4th century (plate lxxvii; Herrmann, 1969, p. 75 fig. 8, pls. V, VIIA, VIIIA, X, XII; Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 155-56 fig. 197, 161 fig. 205, 167 fig. 211, 169-70 fig. 212, 172 fig. 214, 173 fig. 215, 176 fig. 218, 184 fig. 225, 262 fig. 339; Harper, 1981, pls. 9, 10, 13-15, 17, 18, 23, 28, 38).

The soft tunic resembling a shirt had its prototypes in the draped tunics of Parthia and Palmyra, which were, in turn, inspired by Hellenistic examples (Colledge, 1977, pls. 22, 28a, 47; Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 53 fig. 66, 104 fig. 119; see iii, above). The trousers worn by the king consisted of leggings pulled over narrower pantaloons and secured at the upper thigh with a button and strap leading under the tunic to an inner belt (Seyrig, pp. 11, 12); this arrangement is clear on the reliefs of Šāpūr I (plates lxxvii, lxxviii; Ghirshman, 1962, p. 156 fig. 197; Vanden Berghe, pl. 20; Herrmann, 1969, pl. V).

Trousers and leggings, traditional garments of nomadic peoples from harsh climates, were worn as early as the Achaemenid period (550-330 b.c.e.) by eastern Iranian tribesmen (Widengren, p. 261; *Survey of Persian Art* IV, pls. 94A-B, 97, 108A-B; Ghirshman, 1964, pp. 189 fig. 236, 197 fig. 245, 235 fig. 283; see v, below). Henri Seyrig described the *jambières* of the Parthian period as wide tubes of leather or fabric, open at the upper thigh and secured in front to an inner belt (pp. 6-10). In Palmyra and Parthia the leggings were generally attached at the sides or back (Colledge, 1976, pls. 32, 112; idem, 1977, pls. 12, 12b, 22; Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 88 fig. 99, 89 fig. 100, 99 fig. 110). This attire had disappeared at Palmyra by the 2nd century, though trousers continued in use (Godard, p. 295). Throughout the Sasanian period leggings were accepted male garments, worn in conjunction with the soft tunic on both ceremonial and unofficial occasions. Because the leggings were suspended under the tunic it is not always possible to distinguish them from trousers in representations. Despite a later fashion at Ṭāq-e Bostān for smooth *jambières*, the early style of fluttering draperies never disappeared and can be found on the late



investiture relief at the same site (plate lxxiii; Fukai and Horiuchi, II, pl. XIII; idem, I, pls. XXXIX, XLIII).

The leggings or trousers were gathered at the ankles by straps, which were tied around the insteps in bows with long fluttering ribbon ends and fastened at the ankles with circular clasps. Although worn by both nobles and rulers, the long ribbons are more characteristic of royalty. The arrangement of straps and bows can be seen on the reliefs, but it is not clearly represented on the “hunting” plates (plates lxxvii-lxxix; Herrmann, 1969, pls. VIIIA, X, XI, XIIA, XIII, p. 84 fig. 10; Vanden Berghe, pl. 21; Harper, 1981, pls. 9, 10, 13-32, 38, p. 51 n. 62, citing A. I. Borisov and V. G. Lukonin).

This fashion, which is useful for nomadic peoples, was derived from the thongs, probably of leather, that secured the boots and leggings of Iranian tribesmen in the Achaemenid period (Ghirshman, 1964, pp. 185 fig. 232, 196 fig. 244, 205-06 fig. 255; see iv, below). In the 1st century b.c.e. identical straps were portrayed on the reliefs of Antiochus I at Nimrud Dagh (Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 66 fig. 79, 67 fig. 80). Such straps were used among the Parthians and the Kushans in the 2nd and 3rd centuries to gather the tops of boots and the ends of pantaloons (Kawami, pl. 31; Ghirshman, 1962, p. 78 fig. 91; Rosenfield, pls. 146, 2, 22, 119, 120). Long Parthian ribbons tied at the instep prefigured the Sasanian royal ribbons (Ghirshman, 1962, p. 86 fig. 98, p. 94 fig. 105).

A variant in the king's dress is the tunic with a diagonal closing edged with beads, which appears on the relief of Šāpūr I at Naqš-e Rājab, on his statue in the funerary cave of Bīšāpūr, and at Barm-e Delak on a relief of Bahrām II (plate lxxviii; Vanden Berghe, pl. 20; Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 163-64 fig. 208, 65 fig. 209; Frye, 1974, pl. VIII). The shirt overlapping in front was favored by the Scythians in the 4th century b.c.e. and was related to jackets of felt and leather found at Pazyryk, Kurgan 5 (late 4th-early 3rd cent. b.c.e.; Rice, p. 67 fig. 41, pls. 4, 12). This style, with or without an inner shirt, was worn in Parthia and the Kushan empire in the 2nd and early 3rd centuries (Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 86 fig. 98, 88 fig. 99, 105 fig. 120, 109 fig. 125; Sellwood, nos. 35.4, 35.8, 35.14; Rosenfield, pls. 3, 48, 145). The tunic with diagonal closing was never popular in Sasanian Persia, though early coin portraits seem to suggest that it was (Göbl, pls. 2/21, 2/23, 3/36, 3/45): Deborah Thompson believes that it is this tunic, rather than the royal harness, that is depicted on the coins of Šāpūr I (p. 12). A second modification to the royal dress can be seen in the form of the mantle, draped like a jacket below the fastening, on the relief of Bahrām II and his companion at Tang-e Qandīl (Frye, 1974, pls. II, III, IVb, Va). Despite such



minor variations, royal dress remained virtually unchanged until the end of the 4th century. The short tunic and leggings of filmy cloth also became the standard dress of princes and nobles and underwent little change (Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 169-70 fig. 212, 172 fig. 214, 173 fig. 215, 176 fig. 218).

A series of silver-gilt vessels dated from the late 3rd to the 7th centuries and continuing after the fall of the dynasty reveal that Sasanian royal attire was often patterned with triple dots, circles, or beaded bands ([plate lxxix](#); Harper, 1981, pls. 1, 9, 13, 14, 16, 22, 38). The circular shoulder decorations on the Persepolis graffiti, from the very beginning of the dynasty, can be traced on royal tunics represented in metalwork from the late 3rd through the 4th centuries (Harper, 1981, pls. 3, 4, 6, 10, 11a, 13, 23, 24; idem, 1978, p. 89 fig. 30a). These bordered circular medallions contain dotted circles, rays, scallops, dots, and star rosettes, the latter recalling the later roundel on the coat of Anāhīd in the Investiture relief at Tāq-e Bostān. Toward the end of the 4th century the shoulder designs disappeared from male dress, though they were still found on female robes.

The most important symbol of royalty on the silver plates is the harness worn on the upper torso by royal hunters. It consists of diagonal shoulder straps attached to a horizontal strap encircling the upper chest; the juncture in front is marked by a central boss or rosette. Harper has pointed out that these straps, which seem to have been a mark of high rank, had become part of royal dress by the middle or late 4th century (Harper, 1981, p. 39). Although on the two earliest reliefs of Ardašīr I the king wears crossed bands with a central boss (Hinz, 1965, pls. XLVI-XLVIII; Ghirshman, 1962, p. 125 fig. 163; Herrmann, 1969, pp. 73, 74, considering the Salmās relief the earliest in Ardašīr's reign; Hinz, 1965, pp. 148-68, placing it late in his reign), in the rock carvings of Šāpūr I they have been replaced by the royal cloak and do not appear again until the late 4th century, at Tāq-e Bostān (Hinz, 1965, pls. XLVI, XLVII, LI; Ghirshman, 1962, p. 126 fig. 164; Fukai and Horiuchi, II, pls. LXV, LXXIV).

On silver vessels the harness had assumed its characteristic form, with beaded and banded straps and a rosette or beaded boss at the central junction, by the early 4th century. It was tied at the back with two long ribbons ending in jewels or bells and continued as a mark of high rank even after the fall of the dynasty (Harper, 1981, pls. 10, 13-17, 19-22, 24, 27, 28, 33-38). It is worn by the kings portrayed on coins, though it is not clearly delineated until the later examples (Göbl, pls. 7/113, 7/122, 8/136, 8/139, 9/155, 9/156; Ghirshman, 1962, p. 250 figs. 316, 319, 322), and is found on seals of the late 4th and 5th centuries



(Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 240 fig. 293, 241 fig. 294 C), stucco reliefs of the 5th century (Harper, 1978, pl. 41), and royal portrait busts in bronze of the 6th-7th centuries (Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 224 fig. 267, 225 fig. 269). The harness appears in its most elaborate form in the Investiture relief at Ṭāq-e Bostān, on the figures of Ardašīr II (379-83), Šāpūr II (309-79), Šāpūr III (383-88), and Ƙosrow II (591-628). Ƙosrow's harness is the richest, with bands of beads and square gems (plate lxxiii; Fukai and Horiuchi, II, pls. LXXXII, LXVI, III-VI).

4th-7th centuries. Royal dress underwent modifications at the end of the 4th century, as can be seen on the reliefs of Ardašīr II and Šāpūr III at Ṭāq-e Bostān. The hem of the tunic seems to have been gathered at the sides by rings and ribbons, producing a rounded panel like an apron in front (Fukai and Horiuchi, II, pls. LXVI, LXVIII, LXX, LXXIV, LXXXI, LXXXVI). Silver plates dated to the reigns of Yazdegerd I (399-421) and Šāpūr II in The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad, attest the currency of this garment in Persia at the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century (plate lxxix; Harper, 1981, p. 83, pls. 16, 24, 29). Representations on a seal of Bahrām IV (388-95) and on coin reverses of Kavād I (488-97, 499-531) and Ƙosrow I (531-79; Harper, 1981, p. 113; Ghirshman, 1962, p. 241 fig. 294 C; Göbl, tables X/3, XI/3, pls. 11/191, 12/199) show that it continued in use from the end of the 4th to the late 6th century. Its continuing popularity is also attested on post-Sasanian vessels (Harper, 1981, p. 120, pl. 36; Ghirshman, 1962, p. 218 fig. 259). The skirt of the tunic was either cut in this fashion or, more probably, drawn up for convenience in riding (Peck, p. 110). The long skirts of Antiochus I at Nimrud Dagh are drawn up in front by cords from the belt (Ghirshman, 1962, p. 66 fig. 79), and Seyrig has described the Parthian tunic of the early 2nd century as rounded in front and drawn up at the sides (p. 56; Rostovtzeff, 1938, pl. XXII; Colledge, 1977, pl. 28b). The secondary figures on the right of the Boar Hunt relief at Ṭāq-e Bostān also have their tunics tucked up in this fashion (Peck, pl. VIII). This feature was not adopted for the representation of gods, who are always shown in the more conservative cloak and simple tunic (Fukai and Horiuchi, II, pls. LXXIV, LXXV, LXXXVIII).

Also toward the end of the Sasanian period a taste developed for richly decorated caftans of heavy material, with hems dipping to the sides in double points or curves. Such robes are depicted on a series of silver plates and a gold and rock-crystal bowl dated by Harper to the end of the dynasty and the immediately succeeding period (Harper, 1981, pp. 114-15, 120, 130, 132, pls. 19, 27, 33, 36; Harper, 1978, pp. 74-76, pl. 25). Robes with hems dipping to points



had antecedents at Palmyra, in Parthia, and in the Kushan empire in the 2nd century (Ghirshman, 1962, pp. 78 fig. 90, 79 fig. 91, 86 fig. 98, 99 fig. 110; Rosenfield, pls. 89, 60a, 62, 62a). A simple variation appeared at Bīšāpūr as early as the reign of Šāpūr I, but the more elaborate form occurred only at the end of the dynasty (Ghirshman, 1962, p. 153 fig. 196). On the silver plates it is worn by king and courtier alike, in conjunction with high boots with pointed tops. These complex, tight-fitting caftans are also represented on the Boar Hunt relief at Țāq-e Bostān, contemporary with the depictions on silver. Nobles riding elephants wear a type of robe with a curious hem of rounded scallops, which is closely related to the dress worn by nobles on the so-called Strelka (Perm, U.S.S.R.) plate ([plate lxxx](#); Harper, 1981, pl. 19). This arrangement perhaps reflects a skirt with its hem caught up at intervals by some kind of inner construction, but it was more likely cut deliberately as a riding fashion. The robe is worn with smooth, decorated leggings. Servants are shod in boots rising to points below the knees (Peck, p. 111, pl. VI; Fukai and Horiuchi, I, pls. XXXV, XXXIX, XLIII). The closest parallels for such caftans are on 7th-century wall paintings from Afrāsīāb, the ancient site near Samarqand (Shishkin, p. 112). Similar smooth leggings in flannel with pointed tops were found at Antinoë in Egypt in a 7th-century context (before World War II in Berlin, Pfister, pp. 231, 232; Widengren, pp. 254-55 fig. 20).

The servant's boots are paralleled on late or post-Sasanian plates (Peck, pl. VI; Fukai and Horiuchi, I, pls. XXXV, XLIII). Boots, a necessity for riders, are attested from Parthia and the Kushan empire in the 2nd and 3rd centuries (Kawami, pls. 29-31; Widengren, figs. 26, 29). The most telling parallels are from 6th-8th century wall paintings from Ming Oï (near Qizil), Dandan Oïliq, and Bāzāklik in Central Asia (Le Coq, 1928, p. 116; Bussagli, pp. 57, 59, 80). The boots depicted at Bāzāklik are pierced and attached to an inner belt by a cord (Le Coq, 1913, pl. 22).

Another late fashion, peculiar to the Boar Hunt and Stag Hunt reliefs at Țāq-e Bostān, is the low, square cap worn by the king and his entourage. The king's hat is plain or decorated with beads and tied with a short fillet; it has little in common with the tall Parthian hat and Phrygian cap, the types of official headgear worn by nobles in earlier representations. Harper suggests that this hat was a natural outgrowth of Țosrow II's crown, which incorporated a low cap (Peck, p. 121; pls. IV, XIV, XVIII, XIX; Fukai and Horiuchi, II, pls. LXXXIX, XLVIII, LVII). The only apparent parallel is on the rim of a 7th-century silver plate from Kodski Gorodok, on which hunters appear in box-shaped caps tied



with fillets (Smirnoff, pl. LVIII/92).

The king and his nobles on the Boar Hunt relief are clad in stiff, decorated garments with high collars, belted at the waist with nomadic thonged girdles or jeweled belts and decorated with cloth panels; they afford the opportunity to study the garments of late Sasanian Persia just before the fall of the dynasty (plates lxxx, lxxxix; Peck, pls. XIII-XIX; Fukai and Horiuchi, I, pls. XLVIII, L, LVII, LXIV, LXVI, LXXIX, LXXXIX). The winter dress of the Sasanians, which Huart (p. 165) describes as of silk or wool and padded with coarse silk for warmth, would have had the same unyielding surface as the raiment depicted in the reliefs. The king's garment, fastened down the front as a coat, recalls the close-fitting coat on the mid-2nd-century statue of the Kushan ruler Kanishka (Rosenfield, pl. 2). Representations of the 5th-7th centuries at Bāmīān and Qizil in Afghanistan are very similar, with stiff, decorated surfaces, but are open and have broad lapels (Peck, pls. XIII, XIV, XIX; Fukai and Horiuchi, I, pls. XLVIII, L, LXIV; Bussagli, pl. 80; Rowland, pl. 57).

The nobles' caftans are also close-fitting and stiff but have no opening in front (plates lxxx, lxxxix; Peck, pp. 115, 116, pls. XV-XVIII; Fukai and Horiuchi, I, pls. XLVIII, LVII, LXVI, LXVII). Again Central Asian and even Indian examples on 7th-8th century wall paintings offer the closest parallels: tightly fitted caftans, heavily decorated at cuffs, hems, and shoulders (Belenitskiĭ, pl. XXXVII; Shishkin, facing p. 62; Golubew, pl. LV). Sasanian caftans with high collars are represented only at Ṭāq-e Bostān (plates lxxx, lxxxix). The only known parallels are 4th/3rd-century b.c.e. felt trappings from Pazyryk (Griaznov, pl. 56). Widengren suggested that the thong-like attachments to the lapels depicted on caftans in the 7th-century wall paintings at Ming Oï may have been wound round the neck to produce a high collar when the lapel was closed (p. 272; Peck, p. 117; Rice, pl. 179). The closed caftan of the nobles does not seem to fasten, however. Perhaps the rectangular decorated panel on the left shoulder concealed a hidden fastening, as the beaded inserts on Palmyrene and Kushan tunics may also have done (plate lxxxix; Peck, p. 116-17; Rosenfield, pls. 67, 68; Colledge, 1976, pl. 94). The shape of the stiff, close-fitting caftans with narrow sleeves in the Boar Hunt relief is closely echoed in a wool caftan of the 7th century found in a 6th/7th-century tomb in Upper Egypt (now in the Ägyptologische Museum, Berlin), thus from a period when that area was briefly under Sasanian rule. It is not extensively decorated, however, and overlaps to fasten (Figure 61; Knauer, p. 28 fig. 23).

The royal caftan in the investiture relief must belong to the same group as the



garments in the hunt reliefs. It has an unyielding surface trimmed with beads and square gems and strewn with ovoid gems dangling from smaller beads and disks (plate lxxiii; Fukai and Horiuchi, I, pls. III, VI, XII). Jewel-encrusted leggings, ankle straps with beaded edges, and shoes complete this magnificent costume (Fukai and Horiuchi, I, pl. XIII). The god, on the other hand, wears the traditional soft tunic encircled at the waist by a ribbon belt under a cloak held by two round clasps (plate lxxiii; Fukai and Horiuchi, II, pls. XIV, XV). The caftans of the king and his nobles are covered with jewels and myriad patterns of flowers, birds, and animals. Some of these designs appear to be embroidered, others applied. Ammianus Marcellinus, who accompanied the Roman army on campaigns against Šāpūr II in the second half of the 4th century, was struck by the magnificence of Sasanian dress. He spoke of clothes “gleaming with many shimmering colors” and covered with gold, gems, and pearls (23.6.84). By the end of the dynasty the dress of the Sasanian king and court must have been even more dazzling, combining as it did rich decoration and exotic fashions newly arrived from the east.

See also [armor](#); [belts](#); [crowns](#).

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