



DOĶTAR-E NŌŠERVĀN

DOĶTAR-E NŌŠERVĀN (lit., “daughter of Nōšervān”), rock-cut architectural complex with important wall paintings in the Kolm valley in northern Afghanistan, discovered in 1924 (Godard et al., pp. 65-74, figs. 25-27, pls. XLI-XLIII). Of the two niches in the complex the upper one contains a large painting in a very fragmentary state but of particular iconographic importance. The painted framework consists of an architectural form similar to an arcade, originally resting on four columns. Within the central pair of columns are the remains of a painted personage seated on a throne. On the basis of new tracings by Deborah Klimburg-Salter (1989, pl. LXXXVII), this image can now be recognized as an enthroned deity, worshiped by two donors (Figure 20, Figure 21). The throne, supported by two horse protomes, recurs in the early medieval art of Sogdia as an emblem of a supreme deity, most probably Ahura Mazdā (Sogd. Xurmazd[ā]; Mode). In the Kushan period (2nd-3rd centuries C.E.) MOZDOOANO (*mazdā* **vana-*, i.e., Ahura Mazdā; Colpe 1986) was depicted as a king riding a double-headed horse (Göbl, p. 42, pl. 167), probably a forerunner of the “deity with two horses.” The crown of the seated figure at Doĳtar-e Nōšervān is partly damaged; only the upper portion, with a pair of wings surmounted by a ram’s head, has survived. It is reminiscent of crown types from the Hunnic-Hephthalite period (5th-6th centuries). Surrounding the deity’s head is a tripartite nimbus with attached animal protomes. This complex system seems to emphasize the supernatural force of the “king of gods” as ultimate creator of all life. Two elephant protomes (only one of them partly preserved) seem to have been either emanations from the deity’s shoulders (Figure 20, above) or parts of the throne back (Figure 21,



above). They recall an “Indian” element in the iconography of Xurmazd, whom the Sogdians identified with Indra (whose *vāhana*, or vehicle, is the elephant; Belenitskii and Marshak, p. 33; Humbach, pp. 398-402). Most probably, the fragmentary wall painting at Doktar-e Nōšervān should be dated to the early 8th century, reflecting a synthesis of strong Sogdian elements with elements from farther south, at Bāmīān, as well as a few vague survivals from Sasanian Persia.

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