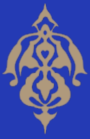

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HUNTING IN IRAN I. IN THE PRE-ISLAMIC PERIOD

Persian has two terms for hunting, naḵjīr and šekār, both of which have spread beyond Iranian languages. The first originated from a compound: *naxu- “first, top,” and *sčara-“what is to be chased,” giving the sense of “top quarry, i.e., quarry sought for the display of the outstanding skill which its pursuit required of the hunter” (Gershevitch, p. 192; Emmerick, p. 62, derives it from *nis-scrya “to be hunted out”). Attested derivations include Parthian nhšyr, Manichean Parthian nxčyr; Manichean Persian nhčhyr, Middle Persian nhčyr, Sogdian naxšīr, Buddhist Sogdian nγšʾyr, nγšyr, Kurdish nēčīr, ničīr, nē(g&)īr (Asmussen, pp. 4-6 with rich literature). Uniquely Iranian in concept, this “cultural term” (Kulturvokabel, ibid., p. 20), spread into other languages “from India to the Mediterranean” (ibid., p. 4). Borrowings include: Aramaic nahširā (in Qumrān, nahšīr); Kharoṣṭhī nācira, Indian (ca. 500 C.E.) naścīra-[pati-], Armenian naxčir (Hübschmann, p. 200), Syriac nahšīrā (Asmussen, pp. 6-7 with literature). In Tajīkī naxčīr/naxjīr has come to mean “mountain goat” (Asmussen, p. 5).

The other word, šekār (now the general term for hunting and the quarry in Persian) is derived from the Old Iranian base *skar- and is attested in an Elamite loanword—ši-qa-ra—from Old Iranian *škăra (Hinz and Koch, p. 108), in Middle Persian škarag “(bird) of prey” (MacKenzie, p. 80); an Aramaic loanword (3rd century B.C.E.) šqrtʾ/śqrtʾ (Gnoli); Sogdian škar- “to drive, lead”; Southern Kurdish šikāl (Asmussen, p. 6); and Ossetic skʿärun (Gershevitch, p.

192). In Baškardi the term šekāl has assumed the meaning of "mountain sheep," while in Tajīkī the two hunting terms are combined (naxčīr-šikār/naxjīr-šikār) to express "the hunt" (Asmussen, p. 5).

Archeological evidence (bones of game, hunting scenes on seals and pottery) indicate that hunting was primarily a source of food and skin clothing throughout prehistoric and early historic Iran (Ghirshman, 1954, pp. 27-28, 29, 31, 37; Porada, pp. 21, 34; Coon, pp. 122-27, 147-59, 170-73, 175-91, and passim). By the fifth millennium, the greyhound was employed in hunting (Ghirshman, 1954, p. 34; for representations on pottery from Susa and Persepolis, see Herzfeld, pp. 52, 54, 57). So important were game animals for the prehistoric society that the desire for quarry such as boar, deer, and wild goat was symbolized in magical forms by the making of clay animal figurines decorated with geometric patterns or by the fashioning of utensils and ornaments shaped as prey animals (Herzfeld, p. 18; Porada, pp. 21, 44). The two most common weapons used in hunting were the bow and spear. The bow, which is first attested in hunting on Susa pottery (Herzfeld, p. 30), later becomes the weapon par excellence of the Iranians, and its association with the hunt is evidenced by the assertion of Onesicritus that the inscription on the tomb of Darius the Great (see DARIUS iii.), carved next to the figure of the king shown as an archer, called him the best bowman and a hunter who "could do everything" (Strabo, 15.3.8). According to Herodotus (1.73), Cyaxares, king of Media, employed Scythian bowmen to train Median youths especially in the art of hunting (for Scythian hunting see Rudenko, pp. 59-60; Jettmar, pp. 18-19, 127, 195, 209, 211).

Iranian tradition regarded the hunt as an essential part of a prince's education. Rostam trains the heir to the throne, Siyāvuš, "in all sorts of accomplishments" such as horsemanship, archery, the use of the lasso, the art of holding feasts and audiences, falconry and whatever concerned the profession of hunting, the law, the crown, oratory, and generalship (Šāh-nāma [Moscow], IV, pp. 10 f.). The education of the upper-class youths of the Achaemenid period is described by Xenophon (Cyropaedia 1.2.3-16; Anabasis 1.9.2-6) and Strabo (15.3.18). The Persian king went hunting "many times a month" and took with him a large number of young men in training (Xenophon, Cyr. 1.2.9, 8.1.38) as well as other companions (Cyr. 1.4.7). The hunters carried bow and arrows, two javelins, and a short sword (ibid.). The state, regarding the hunt as an education which gave "the best preparation for war," provided all the expenses of such hunting parties out of the public

treasury. The king was “not merely the leader in war” but also the leader in the hunt (Cyr. 1.2.10). His zeal in chasing the quarry or facing wild beasts was not to be surpassed. No one was allowed to throw his javelin at a beast before the king, even if the latter’s life was threatened (Ctesias, Persika). Exceptions might be made, as by Artaxerxes I (Plutarch, Moralia 173D 2; ed. and tr. F. C. Babbitt, vol. III, London and Cambridge, Mass., 1949) and the young Cyrus (Cyr. 1.4.14). Darius the Great once dislocated his ankle in the chase (Herodotus, 3.129), and his famous cylinder seal (now in the British Museum) represents him—in Mesopotamian fashion—standing in a chariot and shooting at a rampant lion, whose mate he has already killed (see EIr. VI, p. 501, Pl. LII). Cyrus the Younger overcame a bear singlehanded (Xenophon, An. 1.9.6), and other kings and princes faced wild beasts in the open (Xenophon, Cyr. 1.4.7-9, 14, 16-24; 3.3.3) or in walled parks (paradaisa > Greek paradeisos, Lat. para-dīsus, hence English “paradise”; Cyr. 1.3.14; 1.4.5, 11; 8.1.38; An. 1.2.7; Hellenica 1.4.15; Oeconomicus 4.13.21; see also Fauth; on the word see Hinz, p. 179). Quarry included lions, leopards, boars, bears, deer, all sorts of mountain sheep and goats, and wild ass (gōr) (Xenophon, Cyr. 1.4.7). Because of the speed of this last animal, hunters employed teamwork: they took up positions at intervals; then one chased the beast at full gallop, and, when his horse was exhausted, another began the pursuit until the prey was brought down (Xenophon, An. 1.5.2). Some Persian hunters used the lasso so well that it became their weapon of war (Herodotus, 7.85).

Hounds were kept in large numbers (Herodotus, 1.192, 7.198) to assist in hunting. Documentary evidence (seal engravings and sculpted representations on Greco-Persian monuments from Çavuşköyü, Xanthos, Ergili, and Sidon) show the hounds, individually or in pairs, attacking such prey as boars, stags, lions, and leopards (Boardman, Figs. 885, 886, 887; Kleemann, Pl. 33a; von Graeve, Pls. 37, 39, 42). Four kinds of them are mentioned: Elymaean (Julius Pollux, Onomasticon 5.37); Carmanian (Aelian, De natura animalium 3.2), Hyrcanian (Pollux, 5.37; Aelian, 3. 38; Gratius, Cynegeticon, ll. 161-70); and Median (Gratius, p. 155). Men of rank naturally desired to be represented performing their chief occupations in life, such as attending occasions of state, offering sacrifices, hunting, feasting, and fighting. Hunting scenes are therefore frequent in Achaemenid art. They appear on seals (Maximowa, Figs. 4, 7, 9, 16, 17a; Boardman, Figs. 843, 863, 885-86, 888, 89, 905, 925-29), metalwork (Dalton, nos. 22, 24), and the abovementioned Greco-Persian monuments (see also Borchhardt, pp. 206-11, Pls. 53-56; Benndorf-Niemann; Rodenwaldt, pp. 11-13, 15-17, Pl. 2; Shahbazi, pp. 93-95, Pls. LXII, LXV, LXXXIII;

Mellink).

The importance of the hunt in the Parthian period is attested by classical authors (Philostratus, Vitae sophistorum 1.22, 37; Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 17.2.4 [= 46]). Justin (41.5) goes so far as to assert that the Par-thians "eat no flesh except what they take by hunting," and Suetonius (Caius Caligula 5) reports that, as a sign of public mourning, the Parthians abstained from hunting and feasting. The tradition continued in Arsacid Armenia (Garsoïan, 1981, p. 49). Representation of hunting in the Parthian art is scarce (Colledge, pp. 115, 118-20, 130, 135), but traditions elaborated in Persian sources (e.g., Vís o Rāmin and the Šāh-nāma) and Armenian writings (collected and discussed by Garsoïan, 1976, p. 218) indicate that the hunt was one of the three chief occupations of the Parthian nobility, the other two being fighting and feasting. Garsoïan notes that a heroic hunt was part of the wall decorations of an Armenian Arsacid king (1981, p. 49). "Hunting parks" are also attested for the Parthian period (Philostratus, 1.37) and in Arsacid Armenia (Garsoïan, 1976, p. 218, n. 53; 1981, p. 49).

The well-documented history of the hunt during the Sasanian period is studied by Harper, Gignoux, Erdmann, and others. Ammianus Marcellinus reports that "paintings representing the king killing wild beasts in various kinds of hunting" were favored decorations for Persian mansions (24.6.3). He also describes a hunting park near Ctesiphon: "an extensive round tract, enclosed by a strong fence and containing wild beasts that were kept for the king's entertainment," including lions, boars, bears, and "all other choice animals of enormous size" (24.5.1). A decade before the fall of the Sasanian dynasty, Heraclius captured Dastagerd where the Romans "found countless ostriches, antelope, wild asses, peacocks, and pheasants; huge lions and tigers . . ." (Theophanes, p. 322; tr., p. 26). The epithet of Narsē (r. 286-93) is given as Naxčīrgān "the Hunter" (Biruni, Āṯār, p. 121; Kvārazmi, p. 102 has Naḵširgān), and that of Bahrām V Gōr "the wild ass" (Balʿami, ed. Bahār, pp. 930 f.; Ṯaʿālebi, Ḡorar, pp. 543 f.). They indicate the importance of the hunt. A man who went "neither hunting nor fighting" was considered worthless (Henning, pp. 950, 951). A naxčīrpat or the Master of the Hunt appears in the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt inscriptions of Šāpur I among high-ranking dignitaries (Back, p. 354). Another notable is called wrʾcpt "keeper of boars" (Back, p. 269), and a third officer is known as the keeper of falcons, bāzyār (see BĀZDĀRI).

Sasanian hunting parties were spectacular occasions (Šāh-nāma [Moscow], VII, pp. 340 f.; IX, pp. 211 f.). Interestingly, women of the noble class were allowed

to participate in the hunt (Nāma-ye Tansar, p. 23), and they are indeed shown accompanying Ḵosrov Parvēz in the hunting panels of Ṭāq-e Bostān. The solemnity of the profession is indicated by artistic representations, on metalwork, rock reliefs, seals, and wall decorations. They show the kings hunting lions, boars, stags, and other beasts with bow and arrows, swords, the lasso (Figs. 8, 9, 10), or the javelin (Gignoux, Figs. 1, 8, 9, 10, 15, 20, 21; Harper, Pls. 8-32). Bahrām II (q.v.) is shown in a traditional lion-hunt accompanied by his queen and closest officers (Trümpelmann), and Ḵosrov Parvēz is depicted in two panels sculptured at Ṭāq-e Bostān, one showing him hunting stags, the other boars (Christensen, Iran Sass., pp. 469-73). More elaborate is the description of Ḵosrow's hunt in the Šāh-nāma (IX, pp. 211 f.). He went hunting "according to royal traditions": 300 steeds caparisoned with gold were brought for him; 1,160 loyal servants went forth afoot, javelin in hand; another 1,040 followed, wearing brocade over coats of mail and carrying a sword and a čōb ("stick, pole, staff"). Then came 500 falconers (bāzdār), with sparrowhawks, goshawks, and royal falcons; 300 horsemen together with the cheetah-keeper (yūzdār) followed, leading 70 tame lions and leopards in golden harness and gold muzzles and 800 hounds with golden leashes. Two hundred minstrels (rāmešgar) crowned with gold rode on camels, lutes prepared; and 500 camels brought seats, tents, pavillions (ḵargāh), and a portable stable. Three hundred young princes rode with the king, each wearing bejeweled armband, torque, and belt—all of gold. Two hundred slaves carried censers, burning aloeswood and ambergris, while 200 youthful servants carried narcissus and saffron to scent the air. Preceding all were 100 water-bearers (āb-kaš) sprinkling the road to prevent the rising of the dust.

Throughout pre-Islamic Iran (and Armenia) the concept of the hunt was closely related to supernatural valor and heroic attributes associated with the divinity Mithra (Garsoïan, 1981, pp. 50-54), whose incarnation appears as a fine horseman hunting boars at the Dura Europos Mithraeum (Cumont; Rostovtzeff, p. 280). Barthold had already noted that the heroic image of Bahrām Gōr as a supernatural hunter reflects an identification with Vərəθraγna (> Bahrām, "the giver of victory"; cited and tr. in Garsoïan, 1981, p. 50, n. 84, which continues at p. 52). As Garsoïan has reasoned (1981, p. 54) in Iran and Arsacid Armenia, "the hunt motif both in literature and iconography is a kaleidoscopic symbol reflecting both the present and eternity: the noble rank of the subject, his superior royal qualities, and his supernatural attributes shared with the divine Mithra and obtained through the valor of his companion Vərəθraγna."

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