



SHAMI STATUE

SHAMI STATUE, from Šāmi, Khuzestan, 1.94 m high, the only intact monumental cast bronze of the [Parthian](#) period (BCE ca. 250-226 CE) (Iran Bāstān Museum, Tehran, Museum no. 2401; [Figure 1](#)).

The bronze statue depicting a male figure with a commanding presence was found by the residents of the small settlement of Qal'eh-e Chandar on the edge of the Shami ravine north of modern Izeh (Mālamīr) in Khuzestan Province in 1935. Six months later Sir [Aurel Stein](#) photographed the statue and described the site (Stein, pp. 130-59 and pls. 46-53). The sculpture has been dated to various centuries within the Parthian period with a most probable date in the first century CE (Kawami, pp. 62-63). A consideration of new finds suggests that a second-century CE date is also possible.

The statue was made in two parts: the head was manufactured separately and fits closely onto the body (Stein, 131-32). Both arms, except for a small fragment of the upper right arm, are missing. The general garb of the figure—a sleeved jacket with a V-shaped front closure and loose, full leggings over narrower trousers—was typical dress during the Parthian period from Syria and Mesopotamia throughout [Central Asia](#) (Kawami, p. 60). The widespread occurrence of this garb is confirmed by a fragmentary painting from the Tower Building (late 1st cent BCE-early 1st cent. CE) at [Nisa](#), the [Arsacid](#) capital in what is now Turkmenistan (Pilipko, 2000, pl. I:2); numerous clay and stucco and even metal figurines, both male and female, from Dzhanbas Kala in [Chorasmia](#) (Tolstov, pl. 72, 1-2), Samarkand ([Afrāsīāb](#)) (Kidd, pp. 54-60); and the [Kushan](#) sites of Kampyrtepe (Abdullaev, 1991, no. 137;



Pugachenkova, 1991, nos. 89, 159, 166, 215), Barat Tepe (Pugachenkova, 1991, no. 33), and [Dalverzhin Tepe](#) (Abdullaev, 1991, nos. 166, 173, 182; Pugachenkova, 1991, nos. 62, 76, 159) in southern Uzbekistan; and the dress of the nobleman buried in Tomb IV at Tillya Tepe in northern Afghanistan (Heibert, pp. 217, 265). The hair and beard styles have a similar range, now supplemented by a clay head from the Square Hall at Nisa (Invernizzi, 2001, fig. 10) and sculptures dating from the first to third century excavated at Takht-e Sangin (Temple of the Oxus) in southern Tajikistan, and from the Kushan sites of [Khalchayan](#) (Abdullaev 1991, nos. 188, 190) and the other locations mentioned above. A fragmentary tapestry excavated in the Tarim Basin of northwestern China bears the image of a male whose Shami-like hair and jacket show how far east these elements spread (Mallory and Mair, p. 156, fig. 75).

The ribbed or striped fillet binding the Shami figure's hair does not provide any suggestion of the figure's identity, its date within the Parthian period, or its place of origin, as this general indication of rank was already used in Central Asia in the preceding Hellenistic period (Litvinskij, pp. 39-43). Ornamented belts and heavy necklets are found throughout Western and Central Asia over a long period.

Two details point to connections with regions north and east of Iran. The long slender sword hilts protruding from the top of the loose leggings behind each hip (Herrmann, p. 40) evoke the long-handled swords and daggers excavated from the 1st-3rd-century cemetery at Orlat near Bukhara in modern Uzbekistan (Pugchenkova 1991, nos. 245, 248, 251), and the long sword accompanying the nobleman at Tillya Tepe (Hiebert and Cambon, p. 265). The stippled, fur-like trim of the jacket brings to mind the earlier fur and fur-trimmed garments from Kurgan 2 (the Tattooed Man) at Pazyryk (Jettmar, pp. 112-14) and the sable furs buried in the Arzhan 2 kurgan in Tuva, Siberia (Gryaznov, pp. 26-28, 62-63). The Central Asian and Siberian parallels distinguish the Shami bronze from the other large sculptural fragments found at the site: the Seleucid male head (Smith, no. 95, p. 173 and pl. 57:1) and the right arms from two statues, whose garb and ornament point to southwestern Iran (Kawami, pp. 64-66 and pls. 14-15).

Shami once had a varied collection of monumental bronze sculptures. Seven limestone bases with sunken "footprints" to receive the feet of metal statues show that many monumental bronzes were once installed there. Large-scale images of ancestors depicted in a naturalistic style were a feature of elite

architectural decor in Central Asia before the rise of the Arsacids (Invernizzi, 2001, p. 151; Hiebert and Cambon, p. 111; Tolstov, p. 198). Parthian-period examples are known from Nisa (Invernizzi, 2001; 2007, pp. 164-68; Pilipko, 2001, figs. 86, 139:2, 182-84), and the Kushan sites of Khalchayan (Pugachenkova, 1971) and Dalverzin (Pugachenkova, 1978). The Shami bronze should be viewed in the context of this tradition.

The varied styles, sizes, and materials of the art works found at Shami suggest that the site was a repository or treasury for accumulated items that reflected the power or ancestry of the collector. Shami is a small site, difficult to access and easy to defend. It is more like a redoubt where a once powerful clan could contemplate its history—real or imagined—rather than the administrative center of an active elite. In the 20th century, the Izeh valley served as a sanctuary and place of internal exile for Bakhtiari strong men (personal communication from the late Abdul Karim Geibipur, Izeh, autumn, 1976). Shami may have had a similar function in antiquity.

See also: [ART IN IRAN iv. PARTHIAN ART](#).

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