

# MORPHOLOGY OF THE SCIENCE AND CULTURAL ELEMENTS OF ANCIENT IRANIANS IN THE STONE PANEL OF ANIMATION “BOAR HUNTING” IN THE TAQ-E BOSTAN OF KERMANSHAH, IRAN

MOHAMMAD AREF\*

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*The aim of the article is to interpret the morphology of the 1500-year-old Iranian petroglyphs with the title "Prominent image of boar hunting" in Kermanshah province. This 20 square meter relief was carved on Taq Bostan Mountain in the Kermanshah region and dates back to the Sassanid Empire period. To collect information, library, documentary, and field studies were used in Tehran Animation Institute. The results show that this petroglyph is the animation art of ancient Iran, which has been far from the deep investigation of domestic and foreign researches. The history of world animation dates back to 1892 in Paris.*

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## Introduction

Animated painting is a phenomenon with a relatively short history in both Iran and the world. It is less than a century since the first animation was displayed in Paris, 1892, which was often based on historical events<sup>1</sup>. The 1980 ASIFA regulations define animation as follows: any virtual motion created frame by frame for animated images or motion pictures in cinema is called animation. Anything that does not display the simple movement of a living being and is not in the form of 24 frames is considered an animated film.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the definition of the modern animation era in Iran, approximately reaches to 50 years. However, the finding of this research indicates that the status of ancient Iranian artists will be among the pioneers in the field of innovative ideas for the animation industry in the world of performing arts. Painting on the epigraphs by Sassanid Empire provided clear examples of this type of visual art, with prominent themes such as

deer hunting, and finally, the stone relief of Boar hunting, possibly represents the ingenuity of this historical period artists struggles to create motion picture sequences and Iranian animation. This 8 minutes' animation named "Boar Hunting," tries to reflect a factual version of the original stone carving, created by the author of the article. This animation has been displayed in several international visual anthropological festivals, including: University of Ekaterinburg in Russia, the International Conference on Media, Culture, and Communications at Anadolu University in Turkey, the Argentina Animation Festival, and the National Conference of Anthropology in Iran held in Yazd university. The attendance of UNESCO representative increased significance of this event. Furthermore, it was presented at the initial stage of the theoretical discussion by the Iranian Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. The findings suggest that Iranian animation has the potential to have a fundamental contribution in the field of creative animation in Iran. Since it is accepted by academic societies, including those committed to performing arts, archaeology, history, and anthropology, it will develop Iran's reputation as a historical origin of global animation. Given that the Iranian plateau has consistently

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\* Associate Professor, Faculty of Art, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, Tehran, Iran,  
E-mail: m.aref@iauctb.ac.ir

produced exceptional physicians, astronomers, poets, statesmen, and artists, a question raises that why the name of Iranian performing arts has never been appeared in any historical document, including Oscar G. Brockett's "The History of the Theatre of World" (1985). This is particularly intriguing considering the influence of ancient Iranian performing arts on the world stage, which will be further explored. The 1980 ASIFA regulations defines animation as follow: any virtual motion created frame by frame for animated images or motion pictures in cinema is called animation. Anything that does not display the simple movement of a living being and is not in the form of 24 frames is considered an animated film.<sup>3</sup>

### **Research Questions**

1. Did the artist who created the stone relief of "Boar hunting" during the Sassanid period has knowledge of the animated Assyrian Tree from 3,000 years ago in Zabol?
2. The artist who created the 1,500-year-old stone relief of "Boar hunting" Was Iranian or Roman?
3. If the artist was Roman, why there is no evidence of this technique in any part of ancient Rome, even in places like Trajan's Column?
4. What are the significant factors contributing to the "motion sequence" in the evolution of the idea of animation in the stone relief of "Boar hunting"?
5. Is the stone relief of "Boar hunting" in Taq-e-Bostan, Kermanshah, a narrative painting, visual rhythm, or it is an animation?

### **Research Field Origins**

The name Taq-e-Bostan, originated from the name of a village named Taq-e-Bostan or Taq-o-Vestan (Taq Gostahm), was coined by Mohammad Moein. This village is located approximately 5.7 kilometers distance from the center of Kermanshah and 143 kilometers from Sanandaj, along the ancient road between Sanandaj and Kermanshah, located the behind the Parveh Mountains and facing the renowned Silk Road and the vast Mahi Dasht Plain<sup>4</sup>. Herzfeld has referred to the road alongside Taq-e-Bostan as the 'Gate of Asia'<sup>5-6</sup>. The Neo- poetry Persian poet, Mehrdad Bahaar, mentioned Taq-e-Bostan in addition to Behistun: 'Behistun is originally Baghestan, and the Arabian often call it 'Behiston.' Yaqut says it's a village between Hamadan and Halwan, known as 'Sasbanan village ' and from the description given regarding the Shabdiz Cave, it is clear that it refers to 'Taq--Vestan'<sup>7</sup>. The Sassanid Empire, which considered itself the heirs of

the Achaemenid, has left lasting traces in three significant regions of Iran, including the South (Bishapur), the East (Nishapur), and the West (Kermanshah). according to the existing circular structures and the proximity of both Tags to water springs, the author believes that the likely name for this place was 'Taq-e-Baghistan.' This hypothesis along with Behistun, which is indeed Baghistan, carrying a more profound meaning. Baghestan was the place of Bagh, the Iranian god Mithra, which the Greeks, particularly Euripides, clearly mentioned in a significant play called 'Bacchae.' Therefore, Taq-e-Bostan is a contraction of Baghistan, synonymous with Mithra.

### **Research Methodology**

This article employed library, documentary, and field study research methods (including: observation and interviews). The author's findings are presented in the international and national conferences, to report, introduce, and participate in specialized discussions based on a cognitive understanding of this ancient phenomenon. The research encompasses three significant phases:

- A) A. Field studies, interviews, and photography for data gathering.
- B) B. Library research method through using citation analysis techniques.
- C) C. Data analysis to compare ancient samples, specially the preserved stone reliefs in the city of Trajan's Rome and the cognitive origins of Iranian performing arts. This analysis is focused on the interpretation and analysis of 'motion sequences,' particularly in the stone relief of Boar hunting in Taq-e-Bostan, Kermanshah, drawing from mythological narratives and the historical lives of rulers.

### **Literature Review**

Numerous researchers and scholars have published valuable articles and books about these 'stone reliefs'. Roman Ghirshman (2007), Arthur Christensen (2005), and Shinji Fukai (1984) have all regarded the Boar hunting relief as an astonishing work and have presented scientific research content about it. Additionally, Herodotus and Plutarch, in their 'History of Ancient Iran,' have written with reference to contemporary anthropological knowledge. Bahram Beyzâie, in his book "Theater in Iran" (2000), investigating into the preformation aspects and even narrative paintings of the Sassanid era. Jamshid Malekpour (1985) quoted Plutarch regarding the existence of a theater in Karaman, and the author's research, on Tat and Mede

cultures to achieve an ethnographic perspective of the indigenous 3,000-years-old performing arts, showed the cognitive origins of the Taq-e-Bostan stone reliefs in a book titled 'Komijan: The marvelous Land of the Tats and Medes'.<sup>8</sup> Mikhail Mikhailovich Diakonoff writes about the history of animation in ancient Iran, citing the debate between the ibex and the date palm, which was an epic of the Parthian period, happened during the Sassanid era.<sup>9</sup> The painting of the 'Asourik tree' (symbolic dialogue between a goat and a date palm) on a pottery vessel dating back to the third millennium BC in Iran was well-known. However, none of them explicitly mention the animated nature of the 'Boar Hunting' relief or the Iranian origin of the artist who designed and executed it.

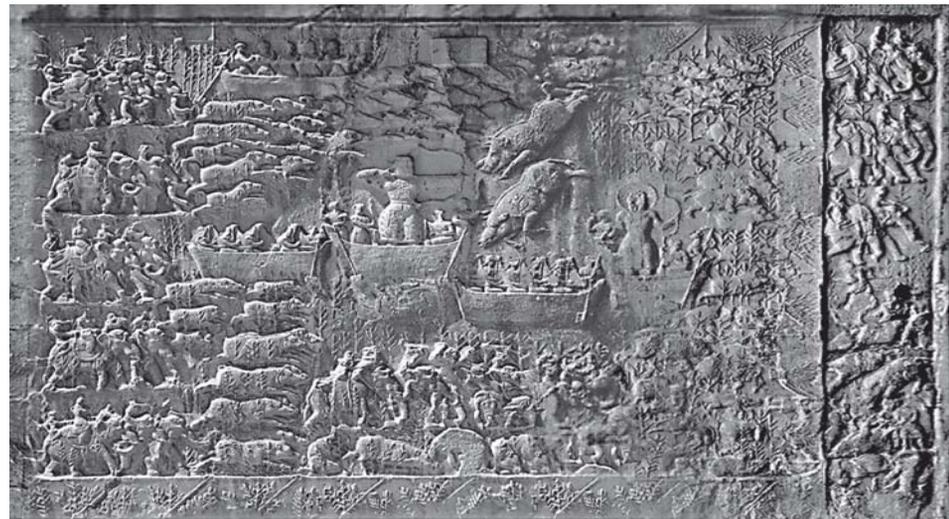
**Discussion**

In Iran Kermanshah province, there exists a rock relief known as the 'Taq-e Bostan,' dates back to the Sassanid kingdom. The prominent reliefs in this ancient Taq (niche) indicates that these two large square reliefs, measuring 20 meters and 18 meters respectively, were executed at distinct points at that time and were created by a single stone carver who likely employed numerous co-works. The 'Boar Hunting relief', carved into the left side of the rock, encompasses various essential elements, including narrative, scenes, figures, events, music, texture, color, volume, time, space, genre, design, symbols, language, purpose, conflict, beginning, middle, and end. In this remarkable relief, the artist portrays the interaction between humans and nature, including fish, ducks, trees, rushes, elephants, boars, water,

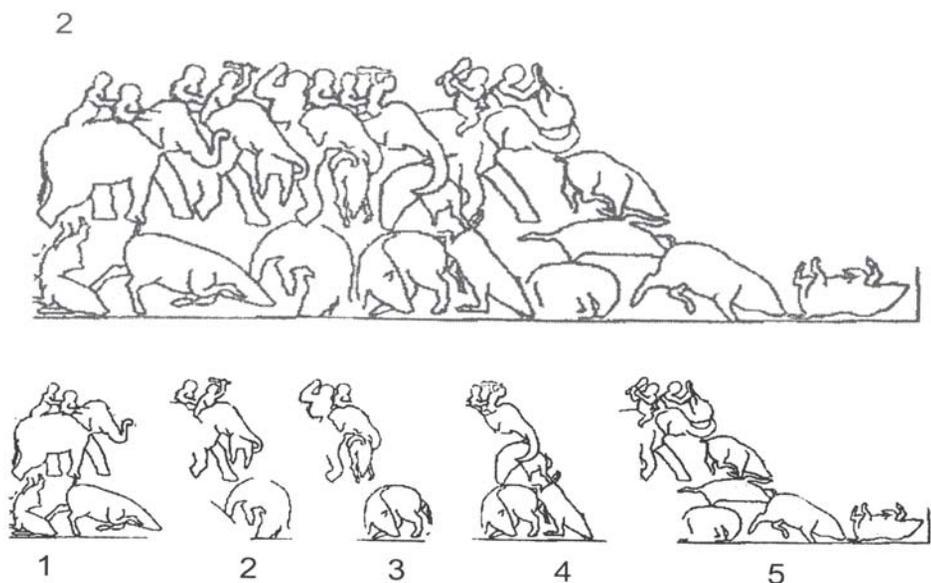
marshlands, and various cultures (the king, his courtiers, and laborers), offering a profound representation of Iranian identity and the exceptional architectural structures endorsed by the kings. Khosrow Parviz, the Sassanid king of the fifth century AD, is depicted on a hunting trip with his entourage, including dancing women, musicians, servants, elephant trainers, and hunters. The king stands



**Fig. 1A** 5000-years-old animated painting illustrating a conversation between a goat and a palm tree on a ceramic vessel in the city of Sūkhteh, Zabol, Iran. Archive of Cultural Heritage of Zabol



**Fig. 2:** A real image of the 1500-year-old hunting scene with a dog on the stela in Taq-e Bostan, Kermanshah, Iran. Archive of Cultural Heritage of Kermansha.<sup>12</sup>



**Fig. 3:** In these two images, five movements (frame by frame) of an elephant are presented separately. Archive of Cultural Heritage of Kermanshah Province<sup>13</sup>

on a boat, and his companions are carefully arranged. The Sassanid stone carver ingeniously creates a dynamic and humanistic tableau of the king's leisure activity, populated by humans and various wildlife, such as boars, elephants, water birds, within the marshlands. Diakonoff notes that the art of sculpture and relief work at Taq-e Bostan encompasses an entirely different dimension. The movements of the boars and elephants are portrayed with such precision that they hold considerable artistic significance, including the detailed representation of the hunters' attire.<sup>10</sup> Concerning the construction history of this hall (arch), there are several accounts: 1- Herzfeld suggests that it was built during the reign of Khosrow II, between 590 and 628 AD. 2- Erdmann posits that it was created during the era of Pirooz I. 3- Van Gall notes that the frame was made during the reign of Pirooz I, while the painting itself was created during the kingdom of Khosrow II. The influence of Sassanid art extended from China to the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Description of two Animated Paintings Based on the Heritage of Ancient Iran***

One of the masterpieces of the ancient Iranian artist is a ceramic vessel painted with a dialogue between a goat and a palm tree, known as the Iranian Assyrian tree. It dates back to the third millennium BC and is associated with the Shahr-e Sukhteh in Zabol.

The above animated painting is divided into 5 frames. According to some mythologists, the goat and the palm tree are symbolizing the close relationship between animal husbandry and agriculture in Iranian mythology.

Godard writes that: "he or she that declares the Roman art has greatly influenced the Sassanid stonecutting style. Even Roman stone cutters had more or less cooperated with them"<sup>13</sup> After conducting the necessary studies on how the sequence of movements forms into an animated painting and aligning it with the stone painting of the boar hunt, the authors presents the findings as follows:

#### ***A) Several Reasons Behind the Concept of the Stone Painting of the Boar Hunt Being Considered as an Animation.***

A.1. This scene, on a frame measuring 5.70 meters in length and 4.13 meters in width, has been carved onto a wall on the left side of the grand hall of Taq-e Bostan. The frame's appearance suggests that 15 elephants have been depicted in 5 rows on the left side of the frame, but the author of this article believes that the number of these

elephants is not more than 3. One elephant is shown to create fear to drive the boars away from the marsh, another elephant is for attacking the boars, and one more elephant is for transporting the killed boars.

A.2. At the top of the frame, 5 female musicians are dancing, celebrating, clapping, and cheering while the king is sitting on a boat, and they are doing nothing else. Therefore, they are not repeated.

A.3. The king stands in a boat and has released his bow to take down a hunt that has been captured by the clamor of the elephants and the trumpets of the elephant hunters in the wetlands of Taq-e Bostan with his hook."

A.4. The boars depicted at the top of the tableau are not a herd; there are actually 7 to 5 boars. The Iranian stone carver artist, following the traditional style of Persian painting, has portrayed numerous boars and elephants to create a sense of rhythm and motion. Many researchers have written, "The king is shooting an arrow at a boar charging toward him," even though a boar fundamentally cannot return. Professor Shinji Fukai has briefly noted the animation aspect of this tableau but hasn't recorded any references. Fukai has written about these two boars (wounded) with great difficulty; can we say that it's one boar depicted twice, or were there actually two boars?<sup>14</sup>

A.5. In another boat, several musicians, specially chosen for the king, can be seen dancing.

A.6. On the right side of the panel, there is a channel for transporting the hunted boars, and laborers are seen loading the lifeless bodies of boars onto the backs of elephants. This channel serves as a trap for the boars that have escaped from the king and the elephant trainers.

A.7. The gatekeeper of the hunting grounds raises a rope that runs along the wall to ensnare the escaping boars in that channel.

A.8. On the other side, an individual who appears to be either the king or a priest holds a bow and is receiving an arrow from the servants. Herzfeld suggests that they likely represented the halo around the king's head with colors, which have faded over time.<sup>15</sup> Izad Mehr also confirmed this divine bestowal.<sup>16</sup> Without a doubt, Taq-e Bostan had an ancient shrine that was apparently devoted to the worship of Anahita in the context of Mazdeism.<sup>17</sup> According to the ancient Iranian tradition, anyone aspiring to be king had to be deserving of royal dignity and the divine glory (Izadi). It is from the power of this Izadi that a person is adorned with spiritual and psychological perfections and is chosen by the Lord for guiding the people. In Zoroastrianism, anyone who is

favoured by the Lord, be it a king, a Persian, or a scholar, possesses the divine glory.<sup>18</sup>

A.9. At the bottom of the frame, only one more elephant (not five elephants) can be seen, gathering the wounded boars. The individuals mounted behind the elephants are presumably engaged in striking the boars that have been trapped.

Additionally, the fourth criterion that distinguishes the Iranian artist from other ancient world painters includes:

1. Motion or movement (the displacement of objects and individuals).
2. Rhythm or sequential order (repetition).
3. Narrative or storytelling (expressing national or indigenous tales).
4. From motion sequence to the idea of animation or moving images (the five elephants at the bottom of the frame).

### ***B) Important Reasons for the Iranian Identity of the Stone Carver Artist of the Boar Hunting Picture***

The writers, based on available documents and the opinions of scholars like Professor Ghirshman, Shinji Fukai, and Diakonoff, who have clearly stated their views on this matter, as well as comparative studies of such visual stone arts in ancient Iran and contemporary countries, has emphasized the cultural symbolism and important factors such as the level of knowledge of the creative artist of each period. They have approached the origin of the Boar Hunting Stone Panel from a biological and cultural anthropological perspective, raising the possibility that the artist behind it was Iranian, not Roman.

B.1. If the artist was Roman, why is there no similar panel left by them anywhere in the world, including ancient Rome itself, such as in Trajan's Column?

B.2. The precision evident in the panel, including the dynamism of the king's gaze, is a testament to the artist's complete mastery of the general culture of Iran (carpets, clothing, music, figures, colors, textures, religious symbols, and even the size of the individuals and filling the entire frame).

B.3. the history of such prominent figures existed on coins and Sasanian carpets three hundred years prior to the prominent figures on the Tâq-e Bostân Kermanshah relief.

B.4. Ghirshman noted that the Romans typically employed a narrative (panorama) style in their paintings, while the Iranians favored profound emphasis on a single subject (deep focus). The prominent Sasanian reliefs, with their composition, style, and family connection, fundamentally remained Iranian, thus representing a distinct contrast to Western prominent figures.<sup>19</sup>

B.5. The history of animation in Iran dates back to the third millennium BCE, with the city of Sûkhteh-e Zabol, featuring an animation of a goat and a palm tree.

B.6. The Sassanid era is famous as the golden period of ancient Iranian art.

B.7. The artist, the designer, and the executor of the hunting scene painting were fully acquainted with the ancient Iranians' dramatic presentation. The rhythm, movement, and frames present in the painting indicates the artist's awareness of the Iranians' body movements and dramatic gestures. Ghirshman writes: "It should be noted that the artists who created this scene were skillful animal sculptors and highly valued, especially in creating the elephants, their realism reaches the level of the most beautiful works of Eastern art".<sup>20</sup> B.7. While the history of the Assyrian palm tree dates back to around three thousand years before the Stone Relief of the Boar Hunt, evidence suggests that the excavation of the residential area in the city of Sûkhteh Zabol is related to a more recent century. Therefore, the stone relief artist of Taq-e Bostan, Kermanshah, in the fifth century AD had no knowledge of the Iranian animation of the palm tree and goat on an Iranian pottery vessel.

B.8. According to the belief of Herzfeld, this stone relief informs us about the style of painting and curtain making in the era of the Sasanian dynasty.<sup>21</sup> Godard claims that some argue that Roman art had a significant influence on Sasanian stonemasonry, and even Roman stonemasons collaborated with them to some extent.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, Katsumi Tanabe, a Japanese researcher, writes that the method of representation and emphasis on the king's individuality and uniqueness through his depiction with a frontal view against other people and animals is a common method in the remaining silver dishes from the Sassanid period.<sup>23</sup> In addition to Godard and Katsumi, Ghirshman also writes that Sasanian kings, more than anyone else, preserved the tradition of elevated stone carvings known since the third millennium BC.<sup>24</sup> later Central European goldsmiths imitated the Sassanid period's embossed themes<sup>25</sup>. The boar hunt panel in Taq - e -Bostan, Kermanshah, will be considered one of the masterpieces of stonemasonry in terms of movements and lifelike

representations, and in fact, the design of this scene is unique and innovative.<sup>26</sup> Kooyaji writes that the crescent around the king means that Mithra is present in the ceremony of Ardashir II.<sup>27</sup> Some others consider it to be the Far Kiani.<sup>28</sup> The boar hunt stone relief is an example of the Sassanid carpet style. Additionally, this Sasanian art is famous in the structures of Kerch, Afghanistan, Sogd, Bamyān, Bactria, as well as in Central Asia.<sup>29</sup> Asia (Darkhsh and Panjikend), and Manichean works in Chinese Turkestan.

B.9. The most important reason is that no similar work has been created in Iran anymore.

B.10. This region, known as Mehrabeh, was regarded as a revered and level place by kings, nobles, and the people.

B.11. These paintings were created at the peak of the expansion of the Mithraism cult into Asia and Europe.

B.12. Essentially, Nahkijr was located a few kilometers away from Taq Bostan.

B.13. The king's selection of this location was likely driven by his intention to promote the culture of Mithra. In doing so, he incorporated various symbolic elements of Mithraism into the site's design. These elements include Taq (reminiscent of the Echo of the Cave), water features (resembling the Echo of the Spring), a lush garden (reflecting the naming aspect of 'Baghestan' and 'Bostan'), and activities like boar hunting and deer hunting, both symbolizing the pursuit of the bull. The location also emphasizes the king's dominion over nature, akin to the goddess Mehr's dominion over nature, with the bull serving as the savior of humanity and the cosmos. Additionally, bloodshed rituals, such as the sacrifice of the bull, boar, and deer, were carried out for the salvation of nature. Music played a significant role, and depictions showcased collaboration between animals and humans, including snakes, lizards, and dogs, underscoring the presence of benevolent beings. The presence of the Angel of Salvation above the door of Taq symbolizes spiritual ascension, paralleling Mithra's triumph over the bull. Furthermore, the encouragement of women in the boat symbolizes the joy of nature and plant growth, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these cultural and religious elements within the chosen location.

Reconstruction of the Original Boar Hunt Painting and Its Decoupage for the Restoration of the Boar Hunt Animation Film

In the tranquility, the hunting ground comes to an end. The water, reeds, fish, and ducks are seen in a serene

and natural setting. The sound of the horn is heard. The face of a boar emerges from under the swamp. Strong men surround the swamp, pulling a net with thick ropes.

The frightened boar comes out slowly, cautiously scanning its surroundings. On the left side, the trap door opens, and a net attached to it is pulled aside as a heavy elephant, accompanied by a mahout and a trumpeter, enters the hunting ground.

The boar, upon seeing the elephant and the mahout, becomes alarmed and retreats slowly. Fishes jump out of the water and then dive back in. A few ducks take to the air. The king's boat, rowed by two men, enters the hunting ground peacefully. The sound of the elephant and the trumpeter fills the space as the elephant repeatedly circles, creating ripples in the swamp.

The heavy footsteps of the mammals within the swamp awaken. Three boars stand facing the king's boat, gazing with eyes aglow from the edge of the swamp. The women musicians approach closer, and their boat enters the swamp. Women are now visible.

The king, placing his hand on the archer's shoulder, takes an arrow from him and aims at the boars. Birds soar above the king and the hunting ground, providing a musical backdrop to the scene.

Another boat, safer than the rest, enters from above. In this boat, five beautiful and relaxed women are seated. One of the boars' senses danger, and all three suddenly run in a 5-meter radius, fleeing. Two other boars run away from below. The sounds of trumpets, elephants, boars, and musical instruments blend in the air.

The king releases the arrow. The arrow lodges in the neck of one of the boars, which lets out a resounding scream that fills the air. The boar falls involuntarily to the ground and is thrown into the air, spinning.

Two more boars, one from above and one from below, collide with the rope wall and fall to the ground. The women enthusiastically applaud and cheer. The wounded boar spins around with an arrow in its neck and involuntarily falls to the lowest part of the hunting ground.

At the peak of the boar's gasps, the joyous sounds of the women musicians are heard, and they continue to cheer the king's success. The king stands on a boat, his figure surrounded by a faint light.

Another elephant steps forward towards the injured boar, and the elephant handlers, from behind the elephant's back, strike the boar with a lance. The boar coils in on

itself and falls to the ground, tumbling toward the hunting ground's bottom.

At the gate of the hunting ground, a gatekeeper, with his hands raised, lifts a net. One of the fleeing boars swiftly passes under the gatekeeper and into the canal. A man with a lance strikes the boar's back, pulling it along.

The king then shoots another arrow, which hits a second boar, causing it to tumble involuntarily to the bottom of the hunting ground. A fifth elephant appears at the bottom of the frame, engaging in five sequential movements (animation). First, with its right hand, it shakes the boar's body. Then, it rolls it on the ground with its trunk. In the third step, it lifts the boar with its trunk. In the fourth step, it holds the boar up while a worker strikes it with a mallet. In the fifth step, the elephant raises the boar above its head and, in the sixth step, tosses it into the canal.

The boar falls into the canal, and the gatekeepers strike another boar with a lance, binding its hands and feet with a rope and loading it onto another elephant, specifically meant for carrying the boars. The elephant moves and exits the canal from above, heading towards the king's kitchen, not seen in the painting. The joyful sounds of the dancing women echo through the air.

Another boar enters the canal, and the gatekeepers throw its body onto another elephant's back. The continuous cheers of the dancing women can always be heard. Another boar enters the canal, followed by a fifth boar.

Everyone is standing on the boat. The king shoots another arrow. A beautiful halo of light surrounds the king. The women musicians continue to play. The dancers are lively. The hunting ground has calmed down, and the elephant handlers, the king, the women, and the gatekeepers all gaze at the canal.

### **Conclusion**

The results of the research show that the ancient site of Taq-e Bostan in Kermanshah, Iran, is renowned as a captivating tourist destination, with its remarkable stone relief of the deer hunt serving as a testament to the artistry of creative Iranian artists during the Sassanid dynasty. This intricate artwork not only showcases their artistic prowess but also hints at a profound cultural and anthropological narrative. It is evident that the artist responsible for these depictions was, firstly, Iranian and, secondly, possessed a vision for imbuing their creations with a sense of animation. As discussed in this article, the

indigenous knowledge of the artist behind the deer hunt and the boar hunt illustrations is likely of Iranian origin. The significance of this region stems from several compelling factors. Deer and boar hunting days were marked by combat, feasting, and grand courtly celebrations, featuring a diverse assembly of participants, from musicians and revelers to the king and guests. Furthermore, Taq-e Bostan serves as a canvas where the Sassanid king's dominion over both humanity and nature is vividly portrayed. These hunting excursions were not merely about demonstrating power but also about entertainment and recreation for the Sassanid monarch. The stone reliefs vividly capture the combat between the king and his retinue against the deer, a symbolic trial of the king's strength. In essence, this site encapsulates the fusion of art, culture, and the grandeur of the Sassanid dynasty. □

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