



## Naqš-e Rostam

To the south of Iran and north of Persian Gulf, there was a state known as Pars in ancient times. This state was being occupied by different peoples such as Elamite through time resulted in remaining numerous cultural materials at different areas including Marvdasht plain<sup>1</sup> confirming its particular significance. The Marvdasht plain is known as cradle of both local and Elamite cultures and civilizations (fig.1). The remains of four periods are seen at Naqš-e Rostam: Elamite, Achaemenian, Sasanian and late Islamic.



**Fig. 2.** The location of the relief at Naqš-e Rostam

### Research backgrounds of Naqš-e Rostam

The first archaeological excavations at Naqš-e Rostam directed by Schmidt<sup>2</sup> who described the site in his *Persepolis*, volume III, without noting the relief. Hermann,<sup>3</sup> Vandanberghe,<sup>4</sup> Sami,<sup>5</sup> Shahbazi,<sup>6</sup> Saeedi<sup>7</sup> and Mosavi Haji<sup>8</sup> have also investigated Naqš-e Rostam remains. In addition, Vandanberghe,<sup>9</sup> Amiet,<sup>10</sup> Porada,<sup>11</sup> Hinz<sup>12</sup> and Saraf<sup>13</sup> have described the Elamite relief which later destroyed in Sasanian period.

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<sup>1</sup> SHAHBAZI (1979) 15.

<sup>2</sup> SCHMIDT (1939; 1970).

<sup>3</sup> HERRMANN, HOWELL (1977); HERRMANN, MACKENZIE (1989).

<sup>4</sup> VANDANBERGHE (1983).

<sup>5</sup> SAMI (1952).

<sup>6</sup> SHAHBAZI (1979).

<sup>7</sup> SAEEDI (1997).

<sup>8</sup> MOSAVI HAJI (1995).

<sup>9</sup> VANDENBERGHE (1983) 29.

<sup>10</sup> AMIET (1966) 560-562,

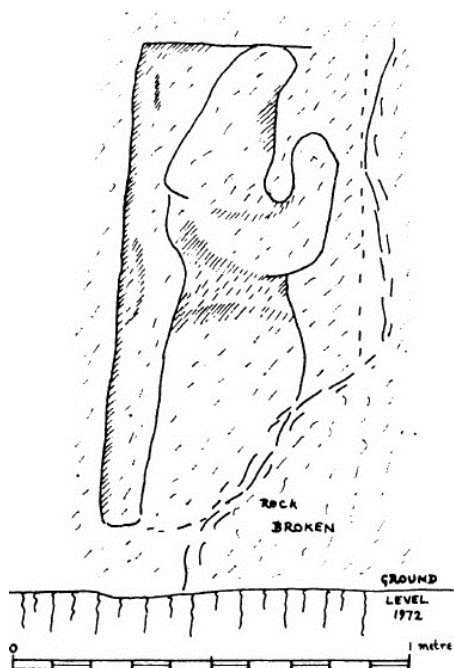
<sup>11</sup> PORADA (1965).

<sup>12</sup> HINZ (1972).

<sup>13</sup> SARAF (2007) 14-17.

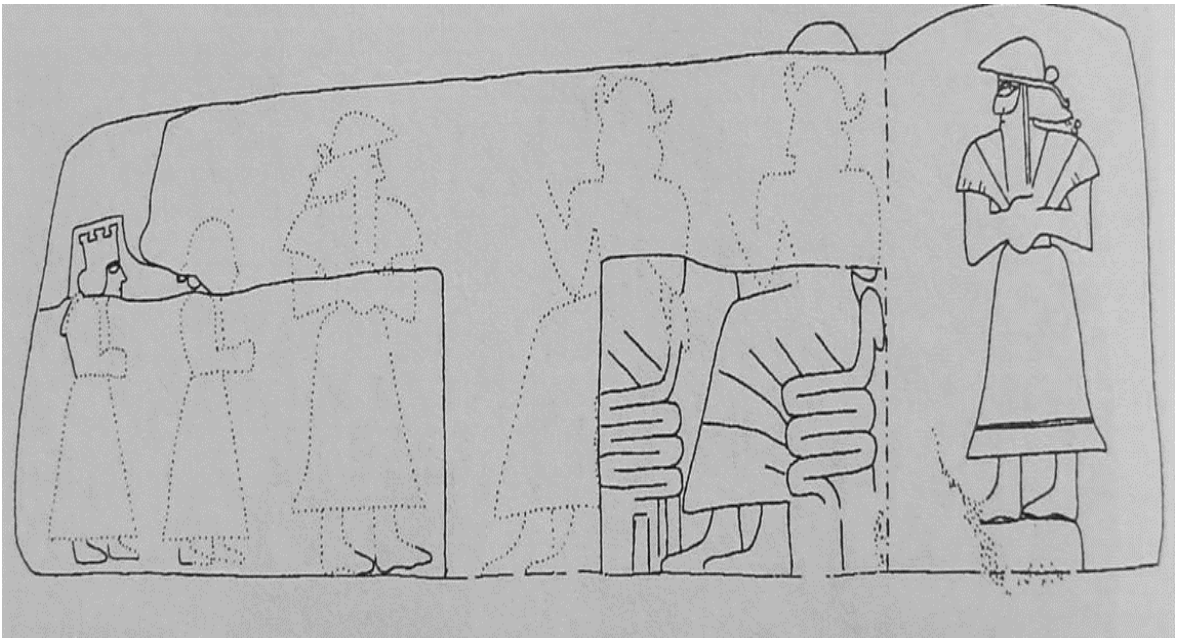


**Fig. 3.** The location of the relief at Naqš-e Rostam



**Fig. 4.** (left). Drawing of the human relief, **Fig.5.** (right) drawing presented by M. Roaf (1974: 200)





**Fig. 6.** A reconstruction of previously known Elamite relief at Naqš-e Rostam

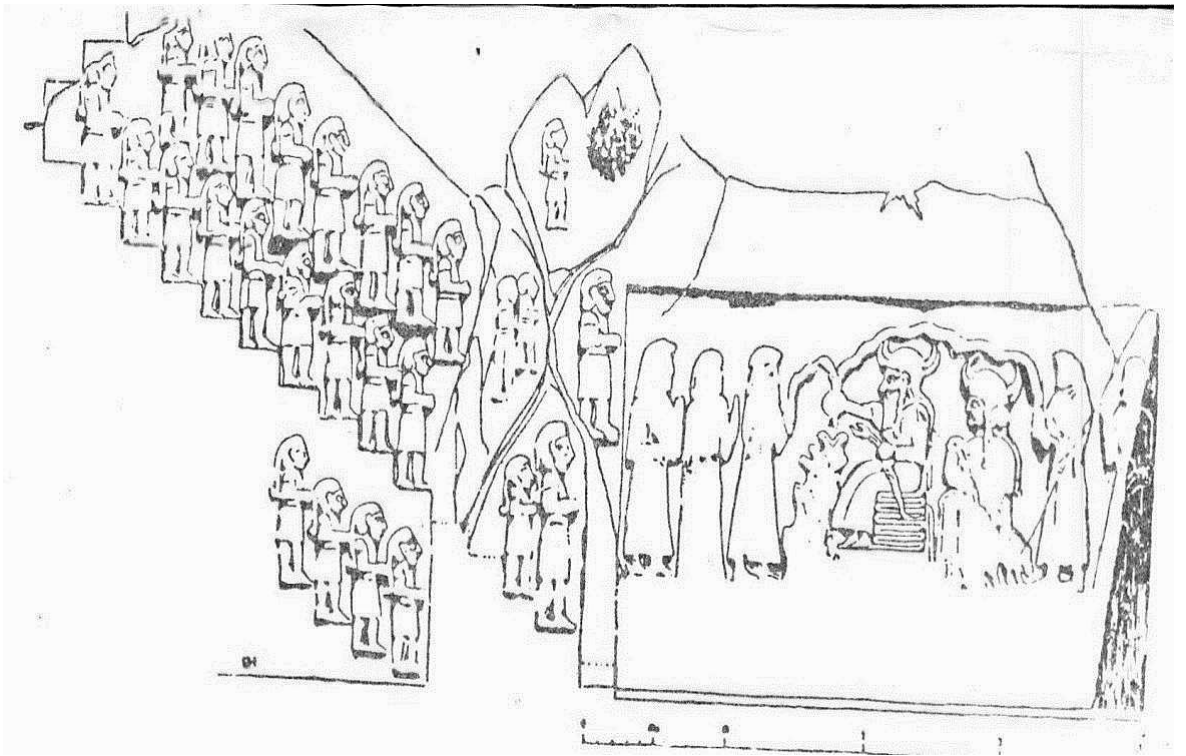
### **The Elamite reliefs at Naqš-e Rostam**

The oldest relief at Naqš-e Rostam belongs to Elamite period. Then, Bahrām II replaced it with his figure and grandees but the previous relief has been remained slightly. Two scenes can be identified in Elamite period. The first scene can be recognized regarding Kurangon relief. Although Elamite relief has been destroyed intentionally, a god and a goddess sitting on a snake-shaped throne can be identified. The figure of goddess can be well identified by a long-corrugated dress. Like gods of Kurangon reliefs, such gods have been shown on their left profiles on the right side of the scene. There are some figures in front of them who are moving towards Elamite gods. There are two figures on both sides of Sasanid reliefs, one of them belongs to a king from new Elamite period who is on the left side and the other relief has been carved with a crenate crown on the right side. The datelines of such reliefs have been discussed for several times. Prada believed that reliefs of old Elamite period dated back to several centuries ago before Kurangon relief and two side reliefs belonged to new Elamite period.<sup>14</sup> Hinze thinks that Durham scene is one thousand years newer than Kurangon relief.<sup>15</sup> According to Amiet, the reliefs in the first scene synchronized with Kurangon and Durham scene belongs to new Elamite period.<sup>16</sup>

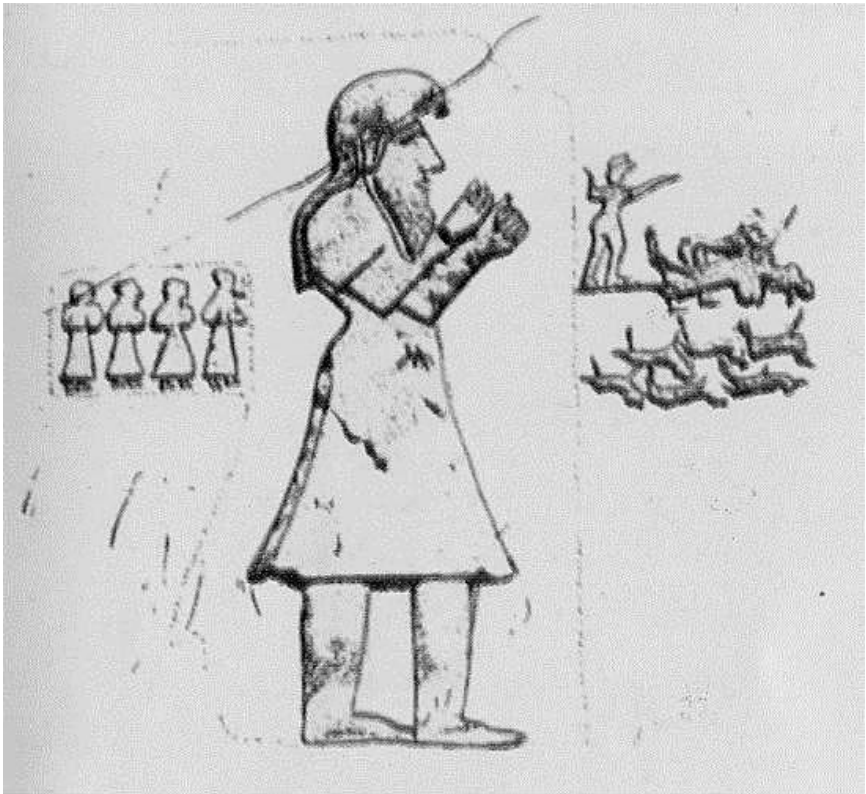
<sup>14</sup> PRADA (1978).

<sup>15</sup> HINZE (1964) 43.

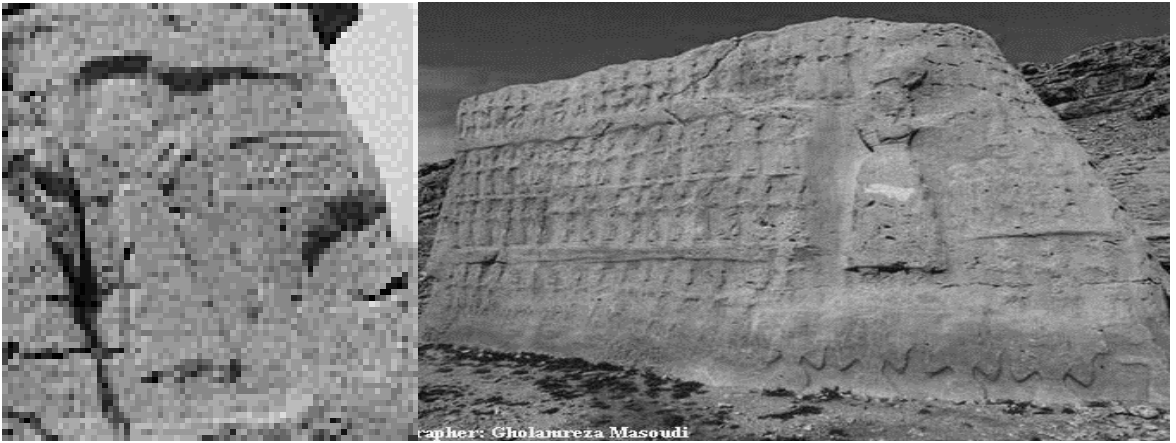
<sup>16</sup> AMIET (1966) 560-562; POTTS 1999.



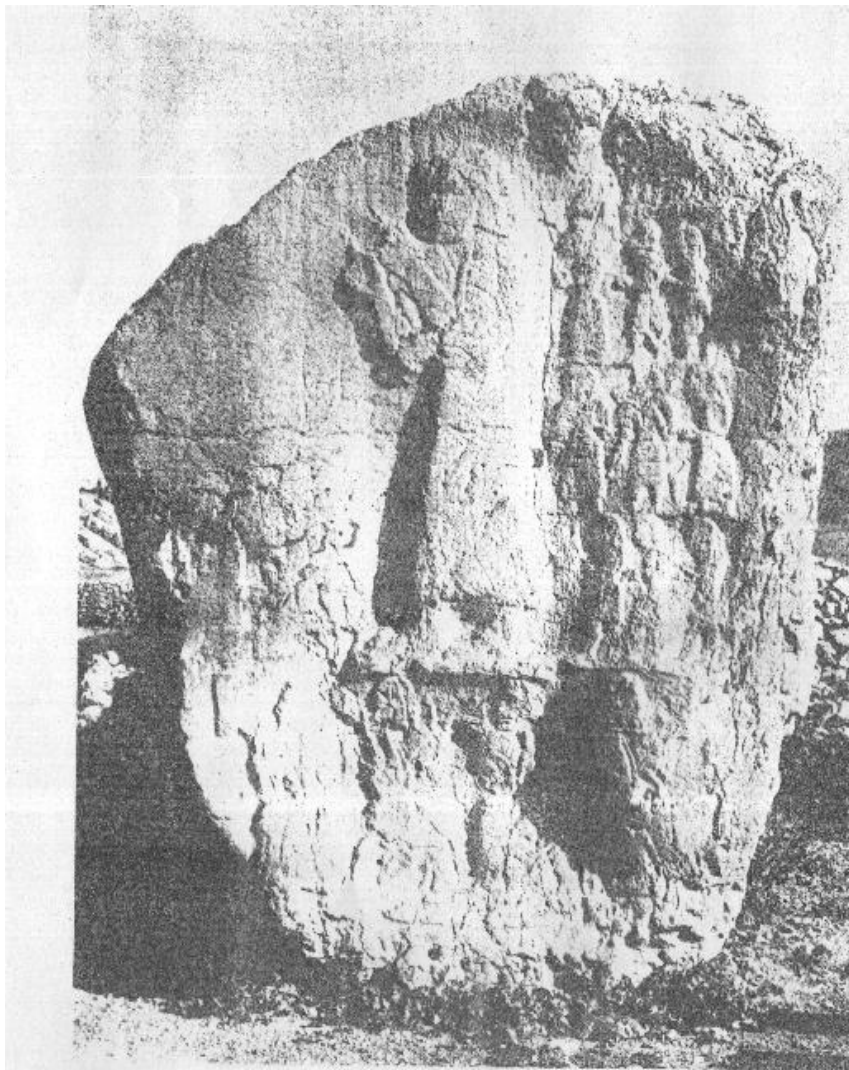
**Fig. 7.** The drawing of Kurangon relief in which some figures similar to the discussed relief are shown (Saraf 2008: 85)



**Fig. 8.** Kull-e Farah II relief (Saraf 2008: 92)



**Fig. 9.** (left) Kull-e Farah III relief, **Fig. 10.** (right) Kull-e Farah V relief



**Fig. 11.** Kull-e Farah IV relief (Saraf 2008: 115)

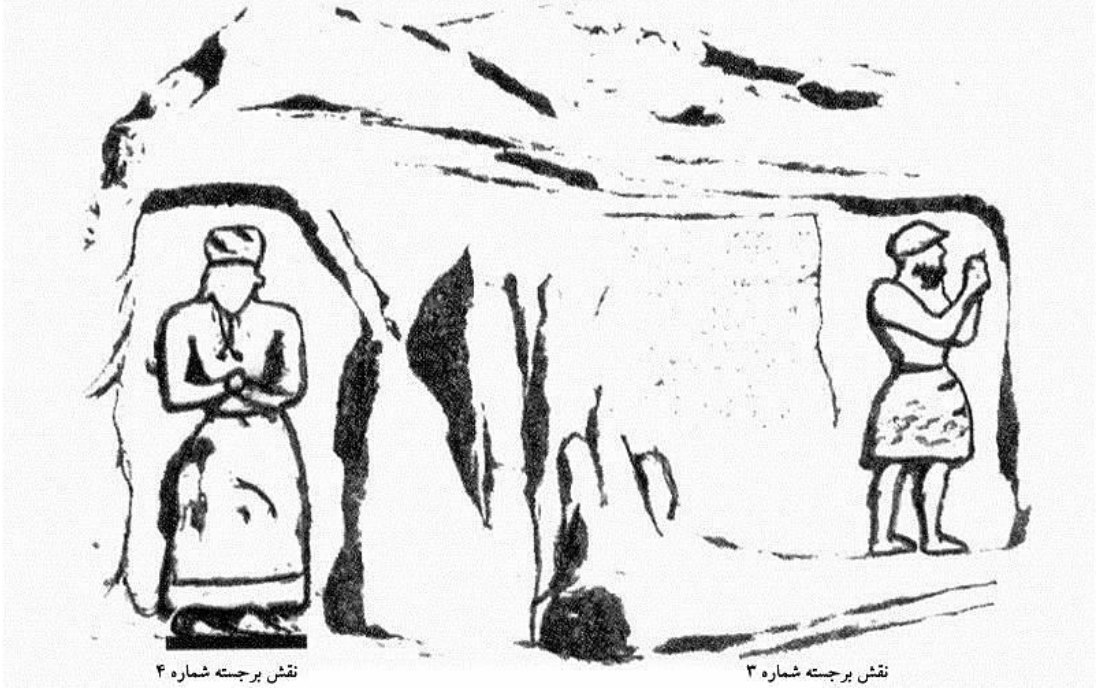


Fig. 12. Eshkaft-e Salman III&IV (Saraf 2008: 119)

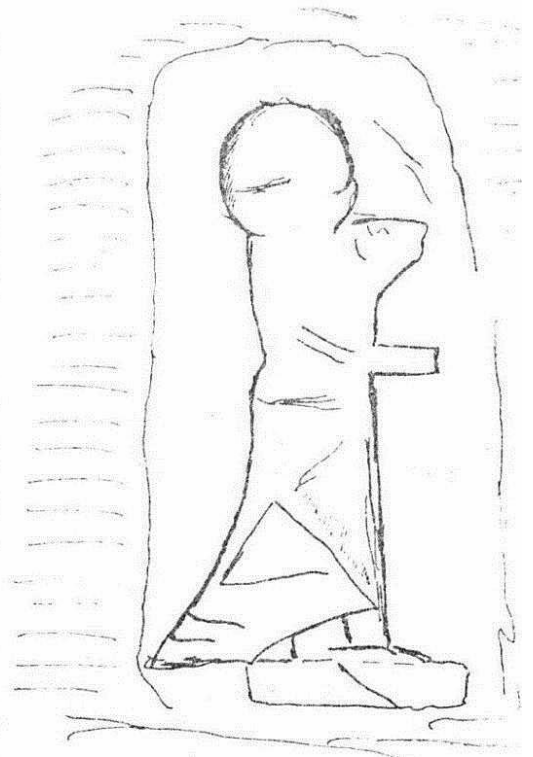
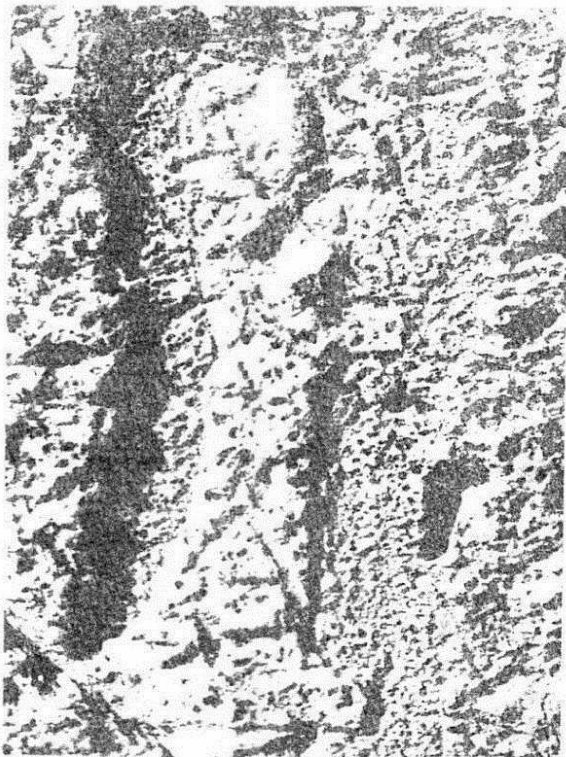


Fig. 13. Hajiabad relief (Saraf 2008: 104)

## **Achaemenian reliefs at Naqš-e Rostam**

It seems that such location has been very important in Achaemenian period such that it is the tomb of four kings. There is an inscription in one of the tombs showing it is the tomb of Dariush I. The other three tombs have been assigned to Xerxes, Artaxerxes and Dariush II. Furthermore, there is a cubic stone structure in front of the tombs and its function has been discussed for several times.

Ka'ba-ye Zardošt is a cubic stone structure with staircases and it is exactly in front of the tomb of Dariush II. The type of materials used in the structure is white limestones. The archeologists and researchers always conflicted about the application of Ka'ba-ye Zardošt structure and many viewpoints and interpretations have been stated about its application. But the presence of a similar structure in Pasargad will make interpretation of Ka'ba-ye Zardošt structure difficult. Any probability should be measured with its conditions and a similar interpretation should be considered for both structures. Some archeologists believe that such structure is a tomb and some others such as Ghirshman and Schmidt believed that Ka'ba-ye Zardošt had been a fire temple where the holly fire had been kept and it was used in rituals. Rawlinson and Walter Hening believed that such structure was a treasure house and a place for keeping religious documents and Avesta. Some believe that this is the temple of Anahita. They also believed that the sculpture of Anahita had been kept in Ka'ba-ye Zardošt. Shapur Shahbazi believes that Ka'ba-ye Zardošt is an Achaemenian tomb and it was used to keep religious documents in Sasanid period.

## **Achaemenian tombs of Naqš-e Rostam**

Achaemenian kings built their tombs on Kuh- Hussein walls (Naqš-e Rostam) which belong to Dariush the great, Xerxes, Artaxerxes I and Dariush II. Since such tombs are similar to each other, only the tomb of Dariush is described here. The exterior view of the tomb is a cliff with 60 m high which resembles to a cross with 22 m high. At the upper part of the tomb, Dariush was sitting on a throne which was carried on the shoulders of people from different lands. The symbol of Forouhar and a brazier have been carved in front of him. There are 9 graves in the tomb showing that in addition to Dariush, his relatives have lied there as well. But there is no evidence to assign such 9 graves to certain individuals. In outer part of the tomb, there are two inscriptions in old Persian, Elamite and Akkadian languages. The upper part of the tomb shows throne image which pillars were built in form of lion paws and twenty-eight individuals (in two rows) carried it on their shoulders and two individuals were carrying the top and bottom of the throne. Dariush, wearing a Persian clothing, holding a bow in his left hand, standing on a three-stair platform, stretched his right hand towards the brazier and Forouhar symbol is placed above his head. A complete circle is seen on the right corner in which there is an arc. Some of his relatives and followers are seen in his both sides. Since, the right hands of both Hormizd and Dariush have been carved similarly in details, the relief shows the direct relationship of the king with the god whose desire was very effective on the acts of the king.<sup>17</sup>

## **Sasanid reliefs at Naqš-e Rostam**

In Sasanid period, the area of Naqš-e Rostam has been religiously and nationally important. Therefore, it is accepted that there is a fence in front of the area. The design of tower and castles is clearly obvious by aerial map. It is not clear whether Ardašīr I had exact information about Achaemenians but the fact that his son, Šāpur II, and him carved reliefs next to the reliefs of their Achaemenian peers at Naqš-e Rostam showed a cultural and political strategy for past imitation. In this location of Sasanid period, reliefs have been created in seven points. There are two scenes in two points.

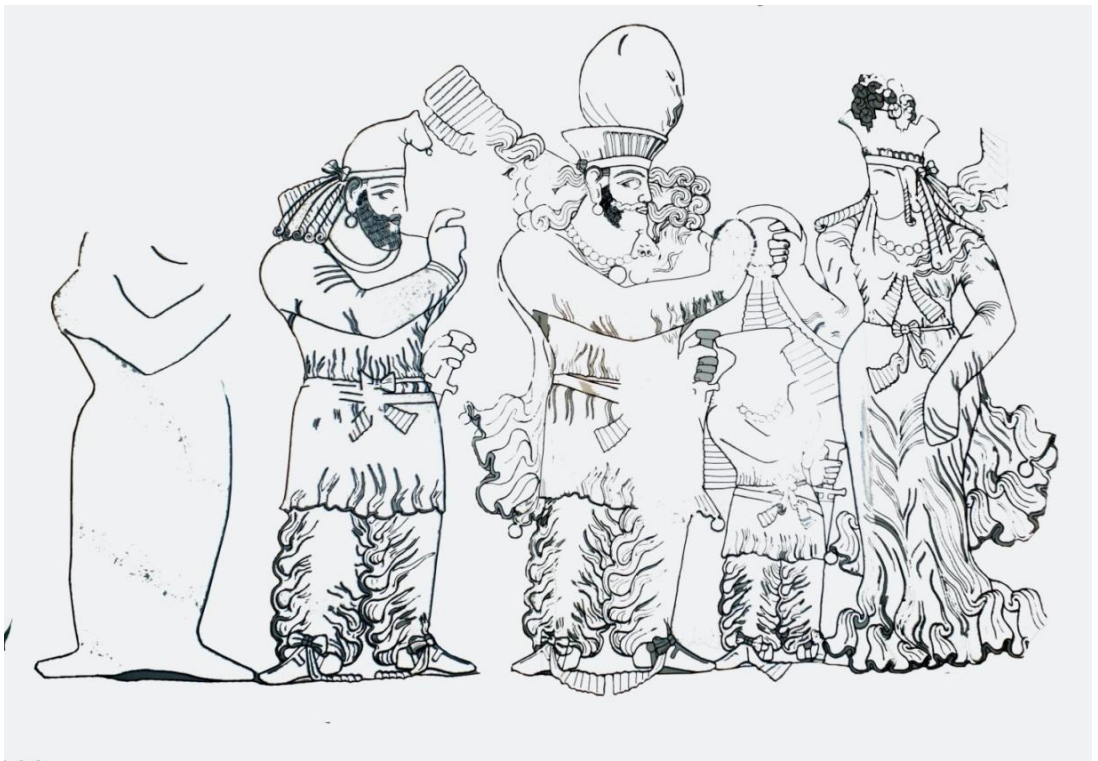
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<sup>17</sup> SCHMIDT (1939; 1970).





**Fig. 14.** Narseh relief at Naqš-e Rostam



**Fig. 15.** The drawing of Narseh relief at Naqš-e Rostam (Herrmann and Howell 1977, Fig. 2)

## **Investiture of Ardašīr I by Hormozd**

The first Sasanid relief belongs to investiture of Ardašīr who is on the southernmost part of Naqš-e Rostam. In this relief, Sasanid king was riding a horse to take the power ring from Hormozd. Two human figures are seen beneath horses' hooves of Ardašīr and Hormozd. Undoubtedly, such relief has been assigned to Ardašīr due to its inscription. Most researchers believe that Hormozd is the one who is riding against Ardašīr<sup>18</sup> but Overleat stated that he was a great Zoroastrian priest who can be Babak, the father of Ardašīr.<sup>19</sup> Most researchers believe that the person beneath the horse's hoof is Ardavān V but Sami believed that he was one of pretenders of Ardašīr dynasty.<sup>20</sup> According to Kaim, he is Ardavān IV.<sup>21</sup>

## **Grandee relief of Bahrām II**

There is a scene from Sasanid period on Elamite relief. In this relief, the king and grandees have been drawn. All researchers believe that the relief belongs to Bahrām II. Some researchers believe that the first person on the left is Šāpurduxtak, the queen of Bahrām II.<sup>22</sup> The person in the middle of the relief is Bahrām II who is standing on the left in full-height. There are three busts on the left and five busts on the right side of Bahrām II. All of these people are looking at the king.

## **The horseback battle of Bahrām II?**

Horseback battle of Sasanid king has been drawn beneath the tomb of Dariush II. Most researchers believe that the king of this relief is Bahrām II.<sup>23</sup> Schmidt stated that it belonged to Šāpur II<sup>24</sup> and according to Mosavi Haji, he belongs to Bahrām IV.<sup>25</sup>

## **The horseback battle of Hormozd II against Ādur Narseh**

There are two scenes beneath the tomb of Ardašīr I. The upper relief has partly erased. the lower relief shows the battle of the Sasanid king. In this relief, Hormozd II has been crowned. A party has been carved exactly above the relief of Hormozd II's battle which lower part has destroyed slightly the upper edge of Hormozd II's battle. According to Schmidt, it shows that the upper relief is newer. Since the relief is incomplete, it is clear that there was no enough time to complete the relief.<sup>26</sup> For this reason, the relief belongs to Ādur Narseh who became the king for few months and he was discrowned by grandees in 309.<sup>27</sup>

## **Triumph of Šāpur I**

One of the scenes that is seen in several sites is the triumph of Šāpur I against Roman emperor. The king is riding a horse while he is taking one's wrist with his right hand who is wearing a Roman clothing. A person was on his knees opposite the king, stretched his both hands towards the king and wanted the king to forgive him. Undoubtedly the king is Šāpur I but there are contradictory views about the two other persons. Many

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<sup>18</sup> SAREE (1921) 35; SCHMIDT (1970) 123; SHAHBAZI (1979) 36; LEVIT-TAWIL (1993)151; KAIM (2009) 409; GRABOWSKI (2009) 24; CANEPA (2013) 865.

<sup>19</sup> OVERLEAT (2013).

<sup>20</sup> SAMI (2009) 132.

<sup>21</sup> KAIM (2009) 409.

<sup>22</sup> SCHMIDT (1970).

<sup>23</sup> CHRISTENSEN (1903); VANDEN BERGHE (1959); CANEPA (2013) 867; SAMI (2009) 135; HAERINCK, OVERLAET (2009) 533.

<sup>24</sup> SCHMIDT (1970) 136.

<sup>25</sup> MOSAVI HAJI (1995) 116.

<sup>26</sup> SCHMIDT (1970) 135.

<sup>27</sup> SHAHBAZI (1979) 124.

researchers believe that the person standing opposite the king is Cerdias.<sup>28</sup> Some others believe that the person on his knees is either Philip Arab<sup>29</sup> or Valerian.<sup>30</sup>

### **The horseback battle of Bahrām II against Bahrām VI**

There are two carved reliefs beneath the tomb of Dariush the great at Naqš-e Rostam. Each relief shows a horseback battle in which Sasanid king overcame the enemy. The upper relief has been attributed to Bahrām II due to the crown on his head.<sup>31</sup> Ali Sami believes that he is Bahrām V,<sup>32</sup> Gall believed that he was Bahrām IV.<sup>33</sup> The helmet on the king's head is in form of a tall sphere located between two wings of a bird. Such helmet is like a crown that has been minted on the coins of Bahrām II. Therefore, it is more probable to ascribe this helmet to Bahrām II. There is another relief beneath the first relief showing the horseback battle of Sasanid king. It is difficult to recognize the real identity of the king because some parts of his crown have been broken. Some researchers such as Zareh, Herzfeld, Vanden Berge and Shahbazi believed that both reliefs belonged to Bahrām II. Schmidt believes that the relief belongs to Bahrām III.<sup>34</sup> According to Mosavi Haji, it belongs to Bahrām VI.<sup>35</sup>

### **Investiture of Narseh by Anahita**

There have been many discussions about such relief and its figures. Ker Porter believed that the relief belonged to the marriage of Bahrām II with an Indian princess.<sup>36</sup> Texier stated that it belonged to Xusrō II Parvēz and his wife.<sup>37</sup> Nowadays, there is no doubt on the identity of the king. The role of Narseh is well identified by the crown on his head. But there are some contradictory discussions about the queen. Most researchers believe that she is Anahita<sup>38</sup> but Weber does not agree with them.<sup>39</sup> Shahbazi believes that the relief shows Narseh and Šāpurduxtak II.<sup>40</sup>

### **A reflection on a forgotten relief of Naqš-e Rostam**

Lastly, M. Roaf<sup>41</sup> found a new relief during his visit to Naqš-e Rostam; he presented an incomplete drawing of the relief (fig.5) and attributed it to the Sasanian king Narseh without any reasonable discussion.

### **Relief description**

In an area between the relief attributed to Narseh and relief of warriors under the tomb of Darius, the Great,<sup>42</sup> one more relief is seen which is so close to the ground surface that its lower parts were even buried (pl.2). The relief has been heavily damaged through time so that details are hardly recognizable. However, a single human figure is represented inside a somewhat rectangular panel with 138 by 60 cm in size and 135 cm in height as well as less than 10 cm in depth. Head, foot and hand are shown in profile facing

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<sup>28</sup> SAMI (2009) 136; MOSTAFAVI (1965) 41; SARRE (1921) 36; VANDEN BERGHE (1959).

<sup>29</sup> GHIRSHMAN (1962); CANEPA (2013) 86; OVERLAET (2009) 462; MACDERMOT (1954) 78; RICCIARDI (2003) 61.

<sup>30</sup> SARRE (1921) 36; HERZFELD (1935) 83; SCHMIDT (1970) 127; VANDEN BERGHE (1984) 71; HAERINCK (1999) 59.

<sup>31</sup> SHAHBAZI (1979); VANDEN BERGHE (1984) 82; CANEPA (2013) 868; GRABOWSKI (2009) 33.

<sup>32</sup> SAMI (2009) 137.

<sup>33</sup> GALL (1990).

<sup>34</sup> SCHMIDT (1970) 131.

<sup>35</sup> MOSAVI HAJI (1995) 118.

<sup>36</sup> KER PORTER (1882) 534.

<sup>37</sup> TEXIER (1842) 228.

<sup>38</sup> SARRE (1921) 37; GHIRSHMAN (1962); SCHMIDT (1970) 134; SHAHBAZI (1979); VANDEN BERGHE (1984) 83; LEVIT-TAWIL (1993) 44; HAERINCK (1999) 55; HERRMANN (2000) 42; SAMI (2009).

<sup>39</sup> WEBER (2010) 312.

<sup>40</sup> SHAHBAZI (1983) 263.

<sup>41</sup> ROAF (1974) 200.

<sup>42</sup> SCHMIDT (1970).

right; hands raised in front of the face, but because of erosion through time their precise position is unclear. Right foot is outlined in the front and the left one in the back perhaps indicating moving position of the worshiper's figure. Right foot is so damaged that almost vanished and hardly visible. Hairs are somewhat long coming down to the shoulder. Apart from nose, other facial details are highly eroded. Figure is wearing a pointed simple cap and dressing up with a long robe while foot is naked (pl. 3-4).

### **Elamite comparisons**

The following Elamite elements are seen in the relief:

Standing position facing right with representation in profile same as those three persons in front of god in Kurangon relief (Fig.7), Kul-e Farah I, II (Fig.8), III (Fig.9) a V (Fig.10), Eshkaft-e Salman III and Hajabad relief.

Worshiping representation with raised hands in front of the face (Saraf 2008:74), an issue which is also seen Kul-e Farah II (Fig.8), V (Fig.10) and Hanne figure in Kul-e Farah I (Fig.14) as well as Eshkaft-e Salman III (Fig.12).

Dressing up with long rope same as main figure of Kurangon relief (Fig.7), right relief of Naqš-e Rostam (Fig.6), Kul-e Farah I, III (Fig.9), V (Fig.10), VI (Fig.11) and Qaleh Toll.<sup>43</sup>

Representing naked foot, an element visible in all Elamite figures who are taking part in ritual banquet.<sup>44</sup> Possible moving position figured by back foot similar to sconces in Kurangon and other places where worshiper is coming to ritual banquet from right orientation.

Representing a kind of bonnet orienting frontward which is very close to the second person who is standing in front of god in Kurangon relief.

### **Sasanian comparisons**

Though Roaf<sup>45</sup> sees this relief as a Sasanian work attributed to Narseh, he presented no evidence in support of his view. In order to consider Roaf's view, therefore, a comparison between the relief and the Narseh relief itself is here discussed. In Narseh relief, representing circular diadem of kingship offered by Anahita to the king, figure is depicted in a relatively real size; head turned 90 degree and represented in profile while foots are shown in frontal in opposed direction. The king has a crown surmounted with a big sphere; hairs are luxuriant curls on his shoulders; Narseh is getting kingship diadem with his right hand while keeping with left hand a slung sword from waist belt. He is wearing a tough cloth, plaited rope and loose trouser (Fig.14,15). In contrary, the aforementioned relief is less than real size representing head, body and foots in profile with a small bonnet orienting frontward, smooth shoulder-length hairs, raised hands in front of face indicating prayer and simple long robe, all different from Narseh relief which depicted elegantly.

In terms of sculpting style, cloth and standing position, this relief is also different from Sasanian reliefs. As seen in Naqš-e Rostam, in Sasanian sculpting art a variant panel was firstly established and then desired figures were depicted inside it. Additionally, figures were usually represented in real size unless numerous figures were needed to be appeared in the scene. These mentioned comparisons, therefore, could weigh an Elamite time more heavily than Sasanian.

### **Conclusion**

The Elamite reliefs and Naqš-e Rostam have been discussed for several times. Different views have been expressed about Elamite and Sasanid reliefs of Naqš-e Rostam and most characters of each relief have been discussed and analyzed. A single relief has been introduced but it has not been referred to yet. Only Michel Roof has visited this relief and addressed it briefly. He believes that the relief belongs to Sasanid period and character of Narseh. The size and depth of reliefs are smaller than other Sasanid reliefs. The state of standing, clothing and details are very similar to the Elamite reliefs. Comparison of the destruction of such relief with other Sasanid reliefs and Narseh located several meters from this relief showed that such relief was older than

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<sup>43</sup> SARAF (2008).

<sup>44</sup> SARAF (2008) 74.

<sup>45</sup> ROAF (1974) 200.



other Sasanid reliefs. However, we cannot refuse that such relief belongs to Sasanid period. This essay hopes that different researchers pay attention to this relief in order to date it more accurately.

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## Summary

### The reliefs of Naqš-e Rostam and a reflection on a forgotten relief, Iran

As one of the most important archaeological sites in Iran and also because of its holiness, Naqš-e Rostam was always being paid attention through historic periods. The earliest remain of the site goes back to Elamite period while many more reliefs were then added in the Achaemenian and Sasanian periods. Except for the Elamite relief which later vanished as Bahram II relief was made over it in the Sasanian period, other reliefs of Naqš-e Rostam date to Sasanian period. However, it seems that there is one more relief which must be dated to Elamite time. This includes a standing human who has raised his hand in front of his face while represented in profile facing right. The relief was firstly introduced by Roaf who attributed it to Narseh, the Sasanian king. This paper firstly describes the relief and secondly suggests an alternative Elamite date as the result of comparative investigations.

**Keywords:** Naqš-e Rostam, Elamite, Sasanian, Relief