

## **The Influence of Greek Aesthetic Characteristics on Parthian Sculpture: A Review on the Evolution of the Parthian Art**

**Alireza Qaderi<sup>1</sup>, Farhang K. Nadooshan<sup>2</sup>,  
Seyyed Mehdi Mousavi Kouhpar<sup>3</sup>, Javad Neyestani<sup>4</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

**From the middle of the first millennium BC, there witnessed a gradual bilateral relation between Iranians and Greeks. These people to people attachments also resulted in interactive influences between these two cultures and arts. Qualitative and quantitative investigation on these interactions is a basic issue in identifying both cultures.**

**The current paper, among all miscellaneous influences of Hellenism on the culture and the art of the Parthian realm, attempts to analyze only the influences of basics and rules of the Greek aestheticism on the Parthian sculpture and come to a historical conclusion based on an inductive method.**

**Keywords: Greek Influence: Aestheticism; Hellenism, Sculpture, Parthian.**

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1. PhD Student of Archeology, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran.  
[alireza.archaeology@yahoo.com](mailto:alireza.archaeology@yahoo.com)

2. Associate Professor, Department of Archeology, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran.

3. Assistant Professor, Department of Archeology, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran.

4. Assistant Professor, Department of Archeology, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran.

## **Introduction**

Works of art can be interpreted and analyzed according to four different views:

- 1) From the viewpoint of form or structure
- 2) From the viewpoint of subject or feature
- 3) From the viewpoint of theme or meaning
- 4) From the viewpoint of function

This article studies artistic data especially on the basis of form or structure. In other words, the form and the structure of every artwork are comprised of following elements:

- A) The visual elements including line, color, tonal value or chiaroscuro, shape, context and space
  - B) The composition rules or bases including harmony, diversity, balance, contrast, predominance/concentration point, rhythm or repetition, creating diversity in the rhythm, motion, conformity/scale
- Studying the art of the Parthian Era shows that the appearance of some new form-related characteristics in the sculpture of this era has not been the offspring of the creativity of the local artists, but it has been the influence of the inspirations

from the Hellenic world. What are these novel characteristics? In what areas and in what kinds of works are they more represented? On the basis of what reasons should their Greek qualities be accepted? And most significant of all, until what time in the art of the Parthian Era do these characteristics continue?

This article which is an attempt to give answers to these questions has a different answer to the later question, from the past ones.

The aesthetic and form-related characteristics will respectively be posed and evaluated in continuation.

## **1. Realism or Naturalism**

It should be considered that drawing limits and determining differences between realism and naturalism such as recognizing naturalism as “appearance” and realism as “being” has been the achievements of European artists and critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this era, the realist artists identified the mission of art as representing the objects “as they are”, and the naturalist artists identified that mission as representing the objects and artistic

subjects “as they seems to us”.

We know that the intellectuals of the Classical Age in Greece took reality a synonym to nature. But we do not know much about the viewpoint of the oriental thought on this subject. However, the mythological characteristic of the oriental thought and the monist specification of this kind of thought can give us the conclusion that in the ancient oriental thought, too, nature and reality were not separate. Hence, in this paper, too, we take the thematic unity of the nature and reality for granted.

The art of the Mesopotamia and Iran, before the permeation of Hellenism into these two areas, like the art of the early Greece and ancient Egypt, did not go beyond the realm of imaginative arts during its history. One cannot find the reason of this phenomenon in the technical weakness of the artists in these areas, because few rare examples, which can be found in the art of these areas, especially the Mesopotamia, show that the artists or the craftsmen there have skillfully been able to progress their artistic subjects. Therefore, the basic reason for their inattention to reality or naturalism must have been the dominance

or priority of religious or political ideologies, and consequently, preference of “the artistic message” to “creating beauty”. It means that the most prominent characteristic of the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Iranian and the early Greek art is the priority of the accurate transparency of the expression to naturalism.

Giant steps in order to realize the representation of nature in art were taken by Greeks in the Classical Age. In this art, that was pacing fast toward nature-based representation, development and evolution, the first statues of human-beings, that were very close to the real body of man, were sculptured, and this movement toward realism reached its climax in the Hellenistic Age, so that, among the works of art of this age, one can find statues that are real shapes of individual human-beings, and the obvious typicality dominant on them in the Archaic Age has disappeared to a great extend. One can consider the phenomenon of “portrait” the offspring of this very reality-based artistic thought. Portrait emerged in the Hellenistic Age and reached its climax in the Roman art and posed the replacement of the idealistic reality of the Classical Age with the visual

or natural reality.

It is essential to mention that the gradual development in the Greek art and its attitude toward realism did not necessarily mean that the symbolic language be erased from the realm of art, but it meant that the Greek artists would rather represent even mythological themes through the features that were very close to reality, although, for example in the Mesopotamian civilization in the Assyrian era, even non-religious and daily issues were represented by the features far from reality.

Utilizing volume instead of lines for forming the artworks; representing the various motions of the human body, freely and unlimitedly; representing the waves and ringlets of hair and the drapery, naturally and softly; representing the contraposto in statues; representing the perspective and foreshortening in the reliefs and manifesting the inner feelings in the faces are among the influential factors in the advancement of the naturalism in art. Some of these rules were adopted from the Greek art, especially the art related to the Hellenistic Era, by the sculptors of the western Asia.

The first sculptures related to the

Parthian Era (not necessarily belonging to the Parthians or local artists) in old Nisa, like all the Greek works that have been found in the realm of the Parthian government, are of a realistic style. Even it is possible to adopt some sculptured heads with real persons (Figs. 1, 2). Also, the sculpture of the horse-rider on the left side of the relief of Hung-e Azhdar at Elymais (Fig. 3), which is of a significant plastic technique, benefits a consolidated realism, although, to some extent, idealistic traditional aspects are visible in it. In addition, the sculpture of this horse-rider represents profound Roman and Greek inspirations.<sup>1</sup>

Also, a marble sculptured head at Shami (Fig: 4) and the sculptured head of a man found in Susa (Fig. 5) are of realistic images, although the sculptured head at Shami is of more Hellenic influences.

Among the statues at Hatra, related to the first and second centuries, and the beginning of the third century A.D, some along with the Greek statues, are of a naturalistic style.

In the statues and portrait busts at Palmyra (as an art influenced by the

Parthians; not necessarily a Parthian art), it can be observed that the creators have tried a lot to make the statues similar to the persons to whom they relate, or better to say, to represent them realistically. It is in spite of the fact that the statues imply idealistic implications. For example, in these statues, like the Greek artistic statues, in order to represent depth in the scene, curtains or garments were imprinted behind the main character illustrated. This kind of curtain that is called “dorsalium” is the evidence on a Hellenic influence.<sup>2</sup> However, in spite of these efforts, the naturalism evident in these works can be observed more in showing the soft style of drapery and the diversity of the faces.

The stucco reliefs at Qaleh-e Yazdgird, which, as the excavator of that site states, trace back to the “last fifty years of the Parthian Era”,<sup>3</sup> in addition to profound Hellenic influences, represent a kind of attitude toward realism. Edward Keall, in the description of some of the stuccos of this castle says, “These features are obviously the features of men. They are not those of gods or saints. Doubtlessly, the artists have had a realistic attitude

toward representing people.”<sup>4</sup> Of course, naturalism or realism cannot be considered the characteristic of all the Parthian sculptures, but some sculptures of the Parthian Era represent this characteristic, and from the first half of the first century A.D on, this characteristic of the Parthian art gradually fades<sup>5</sup>, but it does not disappear completely. The proof on this claim is the artworks found in Qaleh-e Yazdgird.

## 2. Perspective

In the Western Asian art, no sign of representing and appreciation of perspective can be observed. It means that the works of art found in the ancient Middle East certify that the artists in this area did not know that, according to artistic tricks, it was possible to cause a kind of visual error, so that the viewer could imagine a three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. One of the rare examples of this type of artistic manipulation is the stele of Hammurabi, the king of Babylonia. In this stele, the Babylonian sculptor has presented perspective for the first time. This characteristic is visible in all details of the

images related to Hammurabi and Shamash, especially in their faces, eyes, styling of hairs, heads and Shamash's horned hat. The latter mentioned characteristic has been created so proficiently and incredibly that one supposes that it is a free-standing sculpture. But, this technique, not only did not change into a tradition in the Mesopotamian art, but also was forgotten, so that, for example, in the Assyrian Era, in both, Middle and Empire Periods, relief, in reality, was a two-dimensional art that was exercised on the surface of the stones. Therefore, the Assyrian reliefs could never go beyond the realm of being a two-dimensional art.<sup>6</sup> The only exception can be seen in the reliefs of the palace of Sargon II (721-704 B.C) at Khorsabad.

Sydney Smith in his article on the wall-stones found at the above-mentioned palace, at present are in the British Museum, has come to this conclusion that in that works a kind of perspective has been manipulated. One of these reliefs is a relief in two rows in which the collective movement of the tributaries in furry clothes, riding horses and camels is

represented. In this scene, every person, his clothes and movement has been shown uniquely, and the locating position of the animals in a way that they are on different stairs is so obvious that the depth of the stone is unconsciously felt.<sup>7</sup> But these example did not become widespread in the Assyrian, or in general, the Mesopotamian art, and could not go beyond the realm of being exceptions.

Even the dignified Achaemenid art was not familiar with perspective. But in the Greek art, from the beginning of the fifth century B.C. the genesis of the Classical Age, perspective and foreshortening of the parts of the body in the reliefs emerged. In the reliefs related to this period, a piece of cloth hanged from the shoulders, in order for representing depth or filling space, was utilized. In brief, the usage of the techniques for perspective and foreshortening of the parts of the body are visible in most of the Greek reliefs related to the Classical Age and the periods after it.

In the first period of the Parthian art, i.e., from the establishment of the Parthian Dynasty in circa 247 B.C. to circa the beginning of the first century A.D., during

which the Hellenic inspirations were recurrent in the Eastern art, some characteristics are observed in the reliefs that may be considered efforts to represent perspective. As an example, in the stele of Azzanathkona at Dura-Europos (fig: 6), above the head of a sitting goddess, a man pulling an ox has been illustrated. This man is moving in the opposite direction of the other persons, his body has been illustrated in a smaller measure in a distance and height farther than the shapes in the front background of the scene. Susan Downey, correctly claims that this is a representation of landscape, depth and dimensions, and it is under the influence of the Greek patterns of Hellenistic Era.<sup>8</sup> Also, using miscellaneous measures for illustrating people present in the scene of the rock-relief of "Gotarzes Geopothros" at Bisutun (Fig. 7) can be considered an effort in order to represent perspective.<sup>9</sup>

In the beginning years of the first century A.D., when second or the Middle Period of the Parthian art began, a break from the Greek narrative style occurred. The reliefs related to this period usually are without depth and perspective, and they have been created on the basis of the

surface, and the persons, too, have been shown beside each other without any diversification in levels. The persons illustrated in these reliefs are not interconnected with each other anymore. They look at the viewer, so they have a solid and static position.

Effort in order to represent perspective can be traced again in the beginning years of the third century A.D., i.e., the later period of the Parthian art. For example, the inscribed stele of Artabanus at Susa (Fig. 8), relief of Nergal (Hades) at Hatra (Fig. 9), the relief of D at Tang-e Sarvak (Fig. 10) and the stucco reliefs at Qaleh-e Yazdgird (Figs. 34- 38) can be enumerated.<sup>10</sup>

Although in the later part of the second century and the beginning years of the third century A.D., the artists of the Parthian era tried to represent perspective in the reliefs, and they illustrated persons in different levels, it seems that representing some statues as bigger than the others does not imply the further distance of the smaller statues. In any case, even perchance of the perspective utilized in these few works is the offspring of an unconscious effort, Colledge's

verdict that expresses, “The Parthians were of no appreciation of the Greeks’ effort for partitioning space and their knowledge on the methods and rules of perspective,<sup>11</sup> falls into the realm of uncertainty.

### **3. Plasticity**

In plastic arts, plasticity means the ability to take dimensions, the ability to take shape, flexibility, being of volume and being limber. In plastic arts, artists, instead of using lines, utilize volumes. This is of two consequences. First, the work of art seems more real and natural. Second, the visual elements can create a palpable depth, in addition to superficial and ornamental functions.

Among the works of art in the Western Asia before the permeation of Hellenism, there are many free-standing sculptures and a few reliefs that have the above-mentioned specifications. It seems that in creating them, the artists have tried to represent the parts of the body as they really are, and in order to achieve this goal, as possible, they have preferred using volumes over using lines. But, not only did not this specification in the

Eastern works of art change into a rule or tradition, but also even in the first millennium, this techniques, especially in the reliefs, was forgotten. For example, the Assyrian artists in their reliefs utilized a line-based method, and they were of no attention to their plastic and shape-based aspects. However, as it was stated before, the artists creating the wall-reliefs of the palace of Sargon II, made some efforts in order to create plasticity and illusive three-dimensional space. But one cannot consider them successful.

Even the Achaemenid reliefs, though had a little flexibility and plasticity, were apt to a more linear technique.

It was only the Greek art that, from the beginning years of its Classical Age on, was able to change giving shape and using volumes instead of using lines in sculpture into a rule and fundamental tradition. It can be claimed that its reason was the naturalistic and reality based attitudes of the artists of that age, i.e. the Classical Age.

The artists in the realm of the Parthian Empire, under the influence of this very specification of the Greek art, reflected plasticity in their works artworks which were produced in the first period of the



Parthian art, so that the plastic technique can be considered the general characteristic of nearly all the sculptures related to the first period of the Parthian art. The usage of this technique can obviously be observed in many works of art including the shape of the horse-rider and child on the left side of the relief at Hung-e Azhdar (Fig. 3), the rock-relief of "Gotarzes and Mithradates" at Bisutun (Fig. 7), the sculptured head found in Hamadan, the stele of Azzanathkona at Dura-Europos (Fig. 6), the sculptured head found in the north of Mesopotamia, the clay statues from the Square Hall at Nisa (Figs. 1,2) and some other works related to this period. Of course, it needs mentioning that each of these works is of a specific context, reflects some Hellenic inspirations in different ways.

From the first half of the first century A.D. on, when the rate of the Hellenic influences in the Parthian art gradually decreases, the usage of lines in order to give shape gradually increases and the plastic technique becomes less usual and turns into the specification of few sculptures. But, even in the same time, some works that were of profound Greek inspirations were produced on the basis of

this method, such as the marble sculpture head of a man found in Shami (Fig. 4), the sculptured head of a woman (Queen Mosa? or goddess Fortuna?) found in Susa (Fig. 11), etc.

Among the works related to the last years of the Parthian Era, the stucco reliefs of Qaleh-e Yazdgird show the usage of this technique well.

#### 4. Posture

Posture means the position of the feet placing on the ground, or in general, it means the way the statue settles on the ground in different positions.

The Mesopotamian sculptures, from the time of the Ancient Dynasties, especially the Second Era, made the arms as separated from the body. They even made the feet free and separate, without any support to hold them, so the weight of the body fell upon them. Because of this, mostly, the statues broke. Many of these broken statues were amended in that time. Hence, those sculptors, in order to prevent the statues from breaking, or at least, for reducing its possibility, made the feet as single pieces, did not vacate them, made them leaning on a column, or even made the ankles of the statues illogically and

abnormally thick. In general, the shape of the parts of the body in the age of the Ancient Dynasties have deliberately been reduced to geometrical shapes.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the general shape of the statues, without exception, was cylindrical, and this was one of the specifications of the Mesopotamian sculpture in all eras.<sup>13</sup>

In the Egyptian Art, too, for preventing the statues from breaking and making it permanent, the artists made them leaning on a support that was placed behind them. However, in the Egyptian statues, the left foot is always shown before the right one.

The Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Achaemenid reliefs, too, without attention to the heads or shoulders being shown as profile or full-faced, always illustrated the feet as profile.

For the first time, it was in the circa 490 to 480 B.C. that, with the creation of the statue of the 'Kritios Boy' (Fig. 12) in Greece, the rule of "contraposto", which was the result of identifying the rules dominant on the movements of the human body, emerged in sculpture. In the statue of the Kritios boy, the weight of the body has been transferred to the right foot, the left foot, that is a little ahead, is freer than

the right one, and the right pelvis, that carries the weight of the body is a little higher than the left one. The artists of the Classical and Hellenistic ages did not confine themselves to only one position. They, in some statues, put the right foot ahead and represented all the miscellaneous posture positions in their reliefs.

The most regular foot position in the reliefs related to the Hellenistic era that reflected contraposto was the one representing the right foot as profile. It, idiomatically, is called "standbein". In this foot, the knee was shown as a little curved. The other foot was shown as foreshortened from the frontal side. This foot, idiomatically, is called "spealbein".<sup>14</sup>

We consider this way of representing feet as full-faced or profile, especially known as "standbein" and "spealbein", one of the influences of the Hellenic art. Here this issue is evaluated.

Among the statues related to the first years of the Parthian dynasty to the beginning years of the first century A.D., one cannot find an outstanding example of this specification, except for a few imported works and the artworks of Nisa,

which in all probability, are the artifact of Greek artists, whereas, the works related to the time of Antiochos I Theos (c. 69-36 B.C.) at Nemrud-Dagh, that belong to the first century B.C., mirror this specification clearly. In the epitaphs at Nemrud-Dagh, the feet of the persons always are shown clearly as full-faced or profile, whereas the heads always are shown as profile, and the bodies, to some extent, are shown as from the facing side (Fig. 13).

Gradually, from the concluding years of the First Period and the beginning years of the Middle Period on, i.e., approximately the beginning years of the first century A.D., this way of representation is observed in the Parthian reliefs. In the stele of Azzanathkona (Fig. 6), which is related to this time of transition, the above-mentioned method is observed in the man depicted on the right side of the stele. Also, in the Middle Period, that begins from the beginning years of the first century A.D., gradually, the usage of this state of posture increases, so that in the stele of Zeos Kyrios (31 A.D.) (Fig. 14) and Aphlad (54 A.D.) (Fig. 15) found in Dura-Europos, as well as many of the statues at Hatra, this phenomenon can be observed clearly. The other issue to

mention is this that in the statues at Hatra, in addition to contraposto, the standing position with the left foot ahead, that is of Egyptian origin and has influenced the Parthian works via the Greek art, can be observed. But, in one of the statues there, in spite of the other statues at Hatra, instead of the left foot, right one is ahead.

In the latter Parthian art, this influence of the Greek art can be observed clearly in the statue of Hermes at Niniveh, the bronze statue at Shami (Fig. 16), the marble statuette at Susa (Fig. 17), the statue of Abigid at Hatra, the statue of standing man at Sumatar-Harabesi near Edessa in the Northern Mesopotamia, some of the statues at Masjid-i Solaiman (Fig. 18), the reliefs of CN (Fig. 19), Ana (Fig. 20) and BW at Tang-i Sarvak, the four standing persons at Hung-e Azhdar (Hung-i Nouroozi) (Fig. 3), and some other Parthian statues.

From Mathieson's viewpoint: "Usually, the artists in Iran do not render a contraposto in the late Parthian I period, although these traits are found in sculpture in, or from, the western part of the Parthian Empire. But contraposto may be seen in solitary sculptures in Iran, and these exceptions are works which are

copies or imitations of Graeco-Roman art”.<sup>15</sup>

Downey, too, reasons that even in the works merely imitated from the Greco-Roman examples, too, the rule of contraposto has not been appreciated of.<sup>16</sup>

In the bronze statue found in Shami (Fig. 16), the right foot, in the knee, has been bent a little, so that this position can be observed from above the pleats of the cloths that have come down to the thighs. This statue, on the feet, to some extent, implies an elastic state. The right pelvis, in very little manner, veers outward, the right foot, i.e. spealbein, in proportion to the other, a little veers inward. Because of this, the weight of the statue falls on the left foot. These specifications show that the person who created the body of this statue has been of appreciation of the rule of contraposto, though his awareness of that rule has been incomplete. The marble statuette at Susa (Fig. 17) and the relief of BW at Tang-e Sarvak have been created according to the same method. But, as Mathieson believes, in the first place, the creators of these works have not understood the rule of contraposto completely, and in the second place, these

kinds of works are very rare.

One of the other positions recurrently used in the Parthian sculptures is the reclining position. In this position, usually, the left elbow of the sculpture relies on a pillow, another object or ground. Its right hand is on its right thigh, and the left foot, which is under the body, functions as its fulcrum. This position can be observed whether in the statues that have been imitated from the Greco-Roman patterns such as the statues of the naked goddesses at Babylon, Seleucia and Warka (Fig. 33), and many statues of Heracles showing the reclining position, or in the statues that are of an eastern local subject or quality.

This tendency that became the standard posture of the lords in the second half of the Parthian Era and the western half of Parthian area, gradually, from the middle of the first century A.D. on, permeated into Seleucia, Hatra, Media, Elymais and the areas near the Persian Gulf via the areas in the western part of the Parthian Empire, that were under the influence of the Greco-Roman civilization. This mentioned posture can be observed in the reliefs of Tang-e Sarvak, such as the relief of Ana (Fig. 20), the eastern view of relief

of CN, the rock-relief of the reclining man at Bard-i But (Kuh-i Tina)(Fig. 21), on the rock-tombs of Shi-man and Faleh at Izeh, and the Palmyrene tomb (southern tomb) at Kharg, the reliefs of the person to whom the tomb belongs is seen in a reclining position on the throne, that reflects the obvious characteristics of the Palmyrene style.<sup>17</sup>

Reclining statues can be observed in the Assyrian art. For instance, the aforementioned technique can be observed in the relief that illustrates a scene from the banquet held in honor of Ashurbanipal's victory on Te-uman, the king of Elam. This relief was found in Ashurbanipal's northern palace at Niniveh.

In the Greek art, too, this position can be observed in the works related to the first half of the sixth century B.C., in the statues of Heraion at Samos (Fig. 22) that have been presented to Hera (550 B.C.). It means that, from the sixth century on, this position is variously and recurrently used in the Greek art.

On the basis of the following reasons, the emergence of the reclining position in the Iranian sculpture and its revival and evolution in the Mesopotamia art can be

seen as a result of the influence of the Greek art:

- 1) The reclining position in the Assyrian reliefs is very rare, and it is not a dominant artistic tradition.
- 2) This position in the Iranian art emerged only after the time the Greeks entered Iran, and the works related to the Seleucid Era, though being under the influence of the Assyrian art in many other aspects, do not represent this kind of posture.
- 3) The statue of the Heracles, related to 148 B.C., at Bisutun (Fig. 23), a place that was located near one of the important commercial roads between the East and the West, was the first and the most outstanding statue showing the reclining position in the Iranian art, and it could inspire the Iranian artists in creating more works of art.
- 4) The majority of the works found in the Mesopotamia that have reclining position not only are not of Assyrian style, but also they show Greek implication and style, such as the statues of the naked goddesses found in Seleucia, Warka, etc.

## 5. The Illustration of Horse and Horse-

### **Rider**

Horse-riders in the Parthian Era are illustrated in two ways. One of these ways shows Hellenistic tradition, in which the horse-rider is illustrated as profile, and the second one is a completely Parthian way, in which the horse-rider is illustrated as full-faced, such as the horse-rider in the relief of Tang-i Sarvak (Fig. 10), and the reliefs at Dura and Palmyra.<sup>18</sup>

One of the most outstanding examples of the Greek method is the relief of the horse-rider at Hung-e Azhdar (Fig. 3). The general position of this horse-rider is under the influence of the Greco-Roman inspirations.<sup>19</sup> Schlumberger considers this relief one of the obvious Seleucid reliefs.<sup>20</sup> Also, Invernizzi considers this horse-rider similar to the illustrations of the Roman emperors.<sup>21</sup> In any case, the feet of the horse are illustrated as three of them are on the ground, and the way the front foot has raised, with the bent neck can be taken as one of the specifications of the Greek art.

The numerous molded statuettes of the horse-riders representing the horses in running position are of Greek inspirations

as well. One difference is this that in these eastern works, the horse-riders are dressed, and none of the parts of their bodies is naked (Figs. 25, 26).

### **6. The Hairstyles and Face Composition**

The Greek hairstyle in which the hair is grown short with curly or harmonious waves was usual in all over the Parthian realm, so that numerous examples of it can be observed in Nisa, Hatra, Palmyra, Dura-Europos, Assur, etc. In that era, women normally wore their hairs long, frequently with central parting and bun at the back in the Greek way.<sup>22</sup>

Also, the Roman hairstyles became usual in the last years of the Parthian Era, but they could not permeate into the eastern part of Iran. Whereas, in Elymais, numerous works have been found in which the hairstyles are similar to the Roman ones. An outstanding example of these kinds of works is a woman's hairdoing style on a pin-point found in Masjid-i Solaiman (Fig. 27). The woman's hairstyle in this pin-point is very similar to some Roman patterns, especially in the Antonins Age. It can be said that it is similar to the hairstyle of

Faustina, Marcus Aurelius' wife, on the Roman marble portraits and coins.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from hairstyles, the composition of the faces, too, in many of the statues created in the realm of the Parthian Empire are under the influence of the Greco-Roman realistic style. Some of the specifications of the Greek style that have been reflected in the Parthian statues are these: triangular, oval and lentoid eye forms, particularly with the tear duct shown; furrowing of brows; parting of lips and placing of a groove either side of the mouth; horizontal or V-shaped groove in front of the neck.<sup>24</sup>

It is essential to be mentioned that all these specifications have been utilized with an exclusive softness, and the plastic technique has been worked in them. In brief, all these specifications support realism. A. Godard explains about the impression of one of these reality orientated features in the bronze statue found in Shami (Fig. 16) as so:

In this statue, especially in the shape of the head, it has been worked so realistically that I suppose that there might have been the hands of a foreign artist, presumably a Greek or more probably a

Roman in the work. An Iranian having created such a close and similar to reality nose has never been observed before. In this case, I do not mean precision and elegance of the work, because they have wonderfully been worked in the discovered works at Persepolis, but the elegance and precision that is obvious in expressing the state of an obvious subject is demanded an issue that is never oriental. Iranian art, as we know, has a more ornamental quality, and has managed to do it suitably. For example, what it has had in mind in Persepolis has been the representation of the grandeur, splendor and authority of the kingship: a king sitting on a throne, the guards, the soldiers, the people bringing tributes and a lot of people. But, this that the head that is on the king's neck be similar to each head on the shoulders of the soldiers has not been much significance for the Achaemenian sculptors. From one's viewpoint, that advocates generalization in art, the exact representation of a nose has not been considered an elevated artistic creation. The proficiently created curve of the nose of this statue, in a country that this part of the body had often been made like the beak of an eagle, or by

the blacks of the southern part of it had been shown like the bottom of a pot, in my idea, is very meaningful. Hence, the head of the statue, whose quality of the bronze is different from that of the other parts of the body, has been created in an unidentified place, Mal-Amir, by a foreign artist.<sup>25</sup>

In the found sculptured head at the northern part of the Mesopotamia, that was introduced by Robinson in 1927, too, some Greek specifications of the face, such as the wide nostrils that slope upward and are of little convexity, the protrusion on the forehead above the eyes, the elevation of the sides of the eyes with separate eyelids, forehead divided by one horizontal and two vertical short lines and the smooth and polished shape of the sculptured head, can be observed.<sup>26</sup>

In these two examples, the Greek patterns for the faces have been utilized in order to create works with eastern specifications and features. Hence, the existence of the Hellenic elements in these two faces and many other ones does not indicate the western being of the faces' general and complete features. In spite of these kinds of works, there have been

found some statues and statuettes in different parts of the Parthian Empire including Hatra, Nisa, Dura, Seleucia, Susa, Niniveh, Shami, etc, that are imported works, and they have entirely Greco-Roman appearances.

One of the other specifications that, with being influenced by the Hellenistic artistic traditions, permeated into the sculpture during the Parthian Era was the manifestation of the inner feelings in the faces. This influence can be observed in some of the Parthian statues like the terracotta statue of Dionysus at Susa and some other Parthian works (Figs. 28, 29). Diadem, too, which is a Greek headgear, can be observed in the whole Parthian Era: from the first belonging to the beginning of this era (Fig. 2) to the last works such as the reliefs at Hung-i Azhdar, Shimbar, Shirinow Mowri, Bard-i But, Shaivand, Algi in Elymais.

## **7. The Embodiment of Gods in Human Feature**

In the Mesopotamia, this issue was a usual tradition. One can recurrently observe the gods embodied in the human features in its art. Such kinds of works can be observed in the art from the Proto-



literature Age to the Neo-Babylonia. For example the Vase of Warka, the Stele of Eannatum, etc, show this implication.

In the Elamites' religious imaginations, too, the gods were embodied in the human features.<sup>27</sup> a few of the artistic examples of them are on hand in the reliefs, statues, seals, etc.

In general, the artistic data related to cultures and civilizations that emerged before the Greeks, some of which were splendid ones, indicate that embodying gods in the human features is not a Greek thought and innovation, and at least in the realm of the Western Asia, it is rooted in the prehistoric ages. The archaeologists consider the statuettes found in Chatal-Hoyok in Turkey, Tepe Sarāb in the west of Iran, and some other prehistoric sites evidences on the approval of this allegation.

Now, according to these comments, how is it possible to consider embodying gods in the human features as influence of the Hellenic civilization on the Parthian art and interpret it as a Hellenic inspiration? The following reasons make this claim logical:

1) The Greeks were not the first people to

embody gods in human features, but they were the first and the only nations who could maximize the humanization of the faces and even the specifications of the gods along with naturalism in art, so that for many years, the archaeologists and critics assumed that the statues of the young athletes related to the Archaic and Classical Ages were the statues of Apollo.

2) In the art of the era and the realm of the Median and Achaemenid Dynasties, no work indicating the embodiment of the divine features has been identified as a certain divinity-related one. The only motif that can be alluded to is seen in the buildings related to the Achaemenid Era, especially at Persepolis and the top of the porches of the royal tombs. In this motif, a human-being is illustrated in the middle of a winged circle. Whatever this feature that is an adoption of the Egyptian art permeated into the Achaemenid art via the Assyrian features, would be, e. g. Ormazd, Fravahr, splendor of kingship (Farr-e Shāhi) or the feature of the previous king, it is the only divine concept that, to some extent, has been embodied in the human feature in the

Achaemenid Era.

- 3) The Parthians, from the very beginning of coming into the light of the history in 247 B.C, i. e. before coming into the plateau of Iran and reaching to the Mesopotamia and Khoozistan, in their courts at Nisa, grew exposed to artistic traditions that were extremely under the influence of the Hellenic culture and art. The rate of this permeation in the field of sculpture, the subject of our discussion, was as much as just considering them, i.e. the Parthians, merely the orderers and consumers of those works.

Later on, in the four hundred-seventy year long era of the Parthian Dynasty, in their realm, except for the pure Greek works, wherever the sculptors have embodied gods in the human features, this specification is accompanied by other specifications of the Greek art in other aspects. Therefore, in brief, embodiment of gods in the human features, in the Parthian art indicates having been influenced by the Hellenic culture.

## 8. Nudity

We know that in the ancient orient, the prisoners were represented in a

completely nude state. Also, the Sumerian augurs, in the time of being admitted to the presence of the gods, undressed. Such a scene is recurrently seen in the history of the Ancient Dynasties.<sup>28</sup> Also, the artistic tradition of the ancient orient continued until the Parthian Era with creating statuettes of standing nude women with their hands on their breasts or sides,<sup>29</sup> but, an evaluation of the Iranian works shows that in all of them nudity was obviously considered an action done reluctantly.

In the Parthian Era, a half-naked pattern in iconography, presumably for the first time, was selected by creating the statue of Aphrodite Anadiomen (Fig. 30) at the Old Nisa. Such a claim is because of this that as it was stated before, in the Iranian culture, nudity was considered a foreign tradition.<sup>30</sup>

Archaeological evidences, especially in the realm of sculpture, prove this point that in the first case, nudity, in order for representing the beauty of the nude body was brought into Iran by the Greeks, and in the second case, the nudity observed in the Parthian works is limited to the artists' imitations from the Greek patterns. For example, the statues and reliefs of the

nude goddesses at Seleucia, Warka, Hatra, Susa, etc., the nude mankind and divinities in the stucco-reliefs at Qaleh-e Yazdgird (Figs. 34-38) and the rock-relief at Shimbar (Fig. 31) are all imitated works from the Hellenic patterns.

In spite of these works, many of the other works that are of an oriental identity are dressed. Even where the oriental warriors are dressed in the Greek or Roman armour they have worn them on their Roman or Greek counterparts, no part of their legs and arms is naked. Or in the statue of Heracles, the sculptor has dressed him in oriental clothes (Fig. 32). Therefore, it can be concluded that the existing nudity in some of the statues of the Parthian Era is of a Greek origin. But, this aesthetic specification required a long time to be consolidated in the Parthian culture, until the culture of the Sassanid Era (or better to say, the culture of the court and aristocracy of that era) to some extent accepted this norm and utilized it in ornamenting the mosaics, stucco-reliefs, and silver and golden vessels.

At the end, at a point an grotesque deserves mentioning that finding a mascarons ornamented with ornamental stucco at Susa in the years between 1884-

1886 by Dieulafoy can be taken as a proof on Colledge's allegation<sup>31</sup> on the Greek origin of grotesque in Iran.

### Conclusion

The bilateral influencing between the Iranian and Greek cultures from the beginning years of the Achaemenid Era has been verified on the basis of the historical evidence and archaeological findings. Efflorescent Greek cities located on the west banks of Asia Minor and the other peoples neighboring to them were under the reign of the Persian since 548 B.C. The cooperation of the Ionian sculptors, stone-masons and carpenters in creating different parts of Passargad, Susa and, to some extent, Persepolis has been proved.

The era of the Seleucids' government on Iran, that lasted approximately two centuries, has deservedly been entitled "the dark ages". In many of the books concerning the Iranian art, the description of the Parthian art has immediately come after that of the Achaemenid Era. The reason for this fact is that the archaeological heritage of the Seleucids is very trifling.

Parthians, too, were normally influenced by Hellenism, since they entered in the Macedonian-Greek Seleucids' realm and even after they came to power, the main powers neighboring to them, i.e. the Seleucids on the west and the Greco-Bactrian kingdom on the east, were Hellenic civilizations.

Catalyst and generator of this art seems always to have been inspiration from the Greco-Roman areas. Consequently, Parthian art is most static in periods when it is most uninfluenced by western art. Apparently, new stylistic features are always first seen in the western part of the Parthian Empire, whence they spread eastwards to Iran, where they mingle with Iranian traits-which again have an effect in the opposite direction.

It seems that, in the Parthian art, the Roman influences are much less than the Greek influences. The reason is that the gradual expansion of the Roman style in the realm of the Mediterranean Sea and the areas around it was contemporary to the beginning years of the first century A.D. In this period, the characteristics of the Parthian art such as frontality, the spirituality of the features, and the linear illustration of features in the reliefs and

free-standing statues had gradually been consolidated in this art, and a great number of its works maintained those specifications in them until the end of the Parthians' government on Iran. However, in circa the concluding decades of the second century A.D, once more, the Parthian art is influenced by the Greek traditions. According to the following issues:

- A) The existence of the Greek elements in the reliefs of Tang-e-Sarvak, Shimbar, and the stucco-reliefs of Qaleh-e-Yazdgird in the western part of Iran,
- B) The wall-paintings of Kuh-i Khajeh in the eastern part of Iran,
- C) The continuous usage of the Greek script in the time of the Kushan kings,
- D) The usage of the Greek script and language by the early Sassanid kings, and
- E) The existence of the obvious Roman and Greek elements in the Sassanid art, architecture and city planning (Urbanism),

It can be concluded that the process of the Parthian art is not so that it has begun from the Greek style and evolved into an eastern or local style through a mono-linear and straight direction.

Basically, the linear progress idea originates from the numismatic studies and researches and unfairly generalizing them to the other fields.

Sculpture, in spite of coinage, does not follow the official and integral royal regulations. In other words, sculpture does not represent the integrity and centrality of a government as coinage does, and it acts mostly in term of the local traditions.

For seeing the "Iranian Renaissance" one should not consider the first century A.D, but should wait until the time of the Sassanid kings, Ardashir I and Shapur I.

### Endnotes

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that belong to the concluding century of the Parthian era, have a style accumulated with details, in which, for giving shape, lines rather than volume are utilized. The atmosphere which envelops the scene does not have that objective and naturalistic specification of the Hellenic style, but it is rather an open and flat scene. In these works, the subject of the scene is of more importance than the exact representation of the nature.

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- [13] Majidzādeh, Ibid, P. 43
- [14] Standbein and spealbein are two German technical terms. They are used about two different positioning of the feet of the statues on the ground. Standbein means a foot that is illustrated as profile, and spealbein refers to the foot that is depicted as full-faced.
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- [29] Invernizzi, Antonio; 2001, "Arsacid Dynastic Art", *Parthica*, vol.3, pp.135-157.
- [30] Mascaron means illusive or ridiculous masks and images that ornament arches and capitals.
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**Fig 1.** Clay Head, Old Nisa, Square Hall (Invernizzi 2001).jpg



**Fig 2.** Clay Portrait, Old Nisa, Round Hall (Invernizzi 2001).jpg



**Fig 2.** Group of Phileia from Heraion at Samos (Stewart 1990).bmp



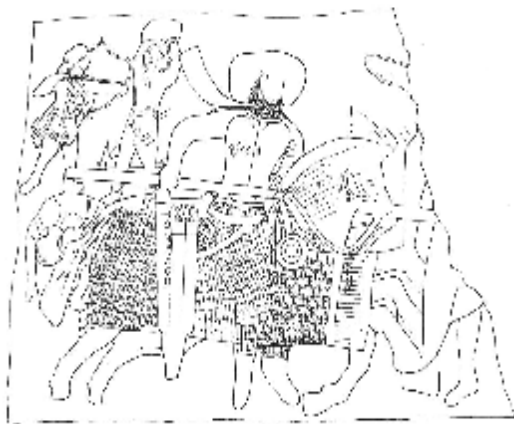
**Fig 3.** Relief of Hung-e Azhdar (Herrmann 1977).jpg



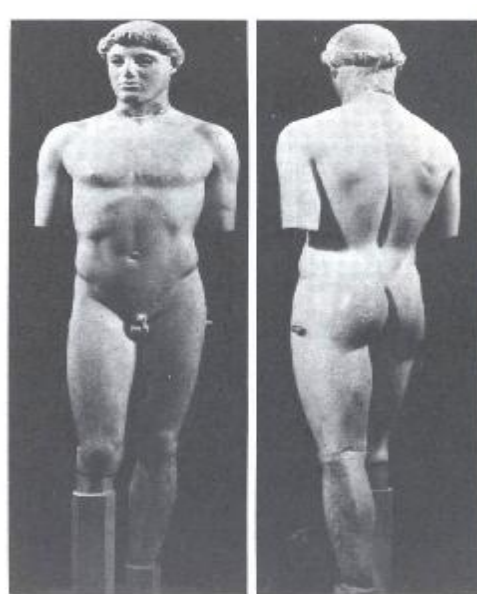
**Fig 3.** Relief of Hunge-e Azhdar (invernizzi.1998).  
jpg



**Fig 11.** Susa, Grey-streaked White Marble Head of Musa or, More Likely, Head of Fortune Goddess (Tyche), ht 40 cm.jpg



**Fig 10.**Tang-e-Sarvak (Gall 1990).jpg



**Fig 12.** Marble Statue of Kritios (Barron 1981).jpg





**Fig 13.** Nemrud Dagh, Antiochus and Heracles-Verethragna, Limestone (69-34 BC).jpg



**Fig 15-LIM~1.JPG**



**Fig 14.** Zeus Kyrios Stele from Dura  
Europos(Mathiesen 1992).jpg

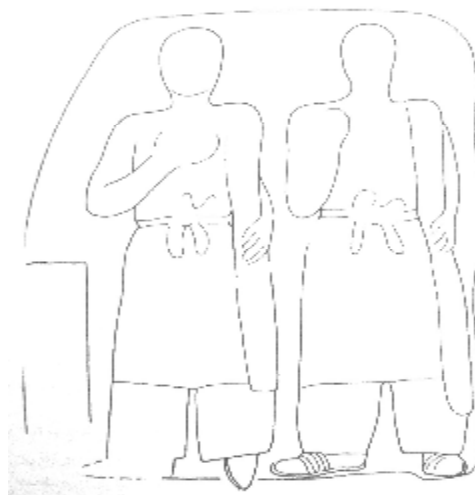


**Fig 16.** Bronze Statue from Shami Shrine, ht 1.90

cm.jpg



**Fig 17.** Marble Statuette from Susa, National Museum of Iran, height 15 cm..jpg



**Fig 19.** (Berghe and Schippmann 1985).jpg



**Fig18.** Bard-i Neshandeh, A,D 200-225, ht 53 cm(National Museum).jpg



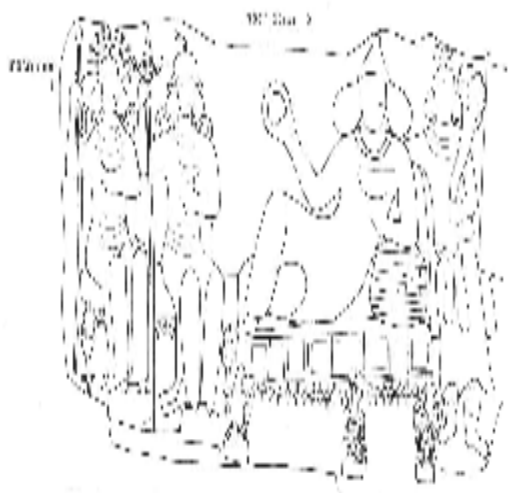
**Fig 19.** Northern View of CN Relief at Tang-i Sarvak (Berghe and Schippmann 1985).jpg



**Fig 20.** Image of Relief of ANa at Tang-i Sarvak (Berghe and Schippmann 1985).bmp



**Fig 21.** Drawing of Relief of the Bard-e Bot-Kuh-e Tina(Berghe and Schippmann 1985).jpg



**Fig 20.**Tang-e-Sarvak (Berghe and Schippmann 1985).jpg



**Fig 23.** Statue of Heracles at Bistoon.jpg





**Fig 24.** Ceramic Plaque of a Mounted Archer, British Museum, London.,jpg



**Fig 26.** Ceramic Plaque of Parthian Horseman, Susa.jpg



**Fig25.** Parthian-Horseman,Palazzo Madama, Turin.jpg



**Fig 27.** Parthian\_Silver\_pin from Masjid-i Solaiman.jpg



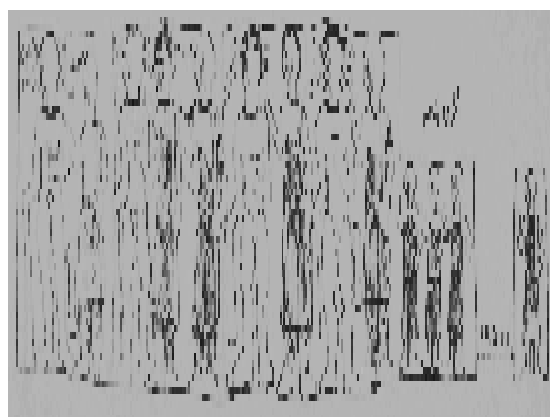
**Fig 28.** Terracota Figurine of Bacchus, Found in Susa, 15 cm, National Museum.jpg



**Fig 30.** Aphrodite, Marble Statue, Old Nisa, Square Hall.jpg



**Fig 29.** Ceramic Parthian Waterspout in Shape of Human Head, 2-3 AD.jpg



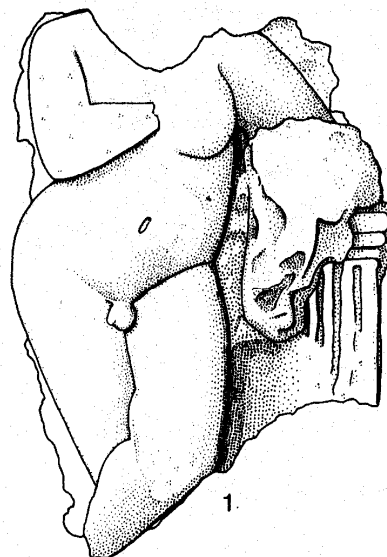
**Fig 31.** Drawing of Relief of Tang-e Botan at Shimbar (Berghe and Schippmann 1985).jpg



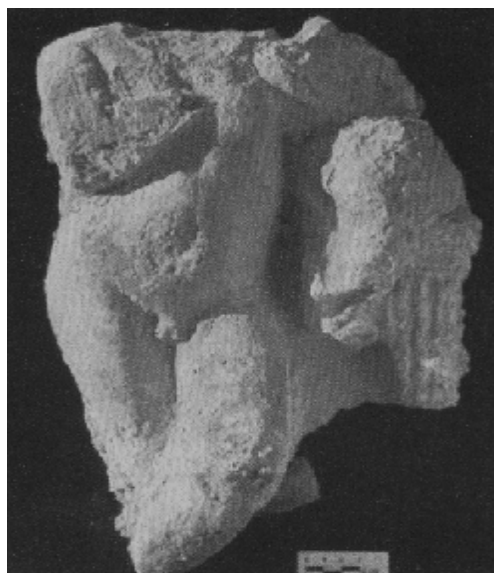
**Fig 32.** Limestone Relief (Perhaps Funerary), Susa,ht  
67 cm (National Museum).jpg



**Fig 33.** Parthian Alabaster, Mesopotamia,2nd Century  
A.D, Metropolitan Museum, London 7.3 cm.jpg



**Fig 34-**(Keall 1980).bmp



**Fig 34-**Cupid or Putto. Nude torso in high relief of  
figure leaning on a fluted pedestal. Qal-eh Yazdgird,  
late parthian(Herrm~1.bmp

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## تأثیر ویژگی‌های زیبایی‌یونانی در مجسمه‌سازی اشکانیان: مروری بر تکامل هنر اشکانی

علیرضا قادری<sup>۱</sup>، فرهنگ خادمی ندوشن<sup>۲</sup>، سید مهدی موسوی کوهپر<sup>۳</sup>، جواد نیستانی<sup>۴</sup>

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از اواسط هزاره نخست پیش از میلاد، به تدریج روابط دوجانبه‌ای میان مردمان ساکن فلات ایران و یونانیان به وجود آمد. این روابط که، جنبه‌های خصمانه‌ی آن نظرات را بیشتر به خود جلب کرده است، منجر به تأثیر و تأثراتی در فرهنگ و هنر این مردمان شد. پژوهش در کم و کیف این روابط، پایه‌ای مهم در شناخت این دو فرهنگ است.

در این مقاله، نویسندگان تلاش کرده‌اند تا در میان تأثیرات قابل توجهی که هلنیسم بر فرهنگ و هنر دوره پارت گذاشته، با بررسی تأثیراتی که اصول و قوانین زیبایی‌شناسی یونان بر پیکرتراشی دوره پارت نهاده، به نتیجه‌ای کلی در مورد مسیر تحول هنر دوره پارت دست یابند.

واژگان کلیدی: تأثیر، زیبایی‌شناسی، هلنیسم، پیکرتراشی، پارتی.

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1. دانشجوی دکترا گروه باستان‌شناسی، دانشگاه تربیت مدرس.
  2. دانشیار گروه باستان‌شناسی، دانشگاه تربیت مدرس
  3. استادیار گروه باستان‌شناسی، دانشگاه تربیت مدرس.
  4. استادیار گروه باستان‌شناسی، دانشگاه تربیت مدرس.