

# Characterology of the Iranian Commander in front of the Emperor in the Rock Relief of Darabgerd

Sorour Khorashadi  
Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, Iran

Seyed Mehdi Mousavi Kouhpar  
Tarbiat Modares University, Iran

Javad Neyestani  
Tarbiat Modares University, Iran

Seyed Rasoul Mousavi Haji  
University of Mazandaran, Iran

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**Abstract:** Characterology of individuals in Sassanian memorial artwork involves benefits from the simultaneous use of detailed historical information and archaeological evidence. In the present paper, the identity of the Iranian nobleman, who seems to be leading the captive Roman Caesar towards the King, Ardashir in the rock relief of Darabgerd, has been challenged. For this reason, investigating the governmental structure of the Sassanid dynasty, the hierarchy of the ranks, the temporary confusion about the existence and function of some positions, as well as the equivalent terms representing them are unavoidable. The historical content of Darabgerd rock relief, displaying Ardashir I's victory over the Romans, has shifted the authors' mentality in identifying the mentioned figure onto a military high rank. Therefore, differing with Hinz (2006:206-207), who has attributed this figure to "Bidaxš of Shapur", a character whom he believes to be the commander of the armed forces, the authors insist on attributing this figure to "Pāpak Hazārpat" as the commander of the royal guard. A historical approach, conducted as a comparative study of the historical narratives associated with the functional domain of the ranks of "Bidaxš", "Hazārpat", "Sepahbad" and "Asbbad" with the positions of the above-mentioned ranks in inscriptional evidence of Shapur I in the Ka'ba-ye Zartosht (meaning the Cube of Zoroaster) and Nerseh at Pāikuli and also the comparative picturology among some Sassanian memorial artwork, has attempted to explicate this ascription.

**Keywords:** Sassanian, Darabgerd Rock Relief, Bidaxš, Hazārpat, Ka'ba-ye Zartosht, Historical Narratives, Comparative Picturology.

## Introduction

Rock reliefs displaying the images of deities, kings, queens, crown prince, authorities, courtiers, and grantees can be considered among the vestiges indicating the glory of the Sassanian art. These reliefs are of high importance in terms of portraiture and physiognomy; since they mostly depict the kings along with their relatives and authorities (Wiesehöfer 1996). Identifying and determining the identity of the individuals depicted on memorial artwork have sometimes become possible with the aid of the existing evidence and documents, and occasionally by appealing to the artistic manifestations and conventions, even when merely the names of high-ranking and eminent individuals have been mentioned. The present research is necessary because of the lack of actual knowledge on the existence and nobility of some governmental ranks in the Sassanid era. This weakness has been affected by the fact that researchers have merely taken into account the historical

narratives, resulting in an unclear image of the hierarchical structure of the Sassanid dynasty. As most researchers have not benefited from the historical and archaeological

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\* Sorour Khorashadi  
Department of Archaeology,  
Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, Tehran, Iran.  
sorur\_khorashadi@yahoo.com

Seyed Mehdi Mousavi Kouhpar  
Department of Archaeology,  
Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran.

Javad Neyestani  
Department of Archaeology,  
Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran.

Seyed Rasoul Mousavi Haji  
Department of Archaeology,  
University of Mazandaran, Babolsar, Iran.



Fig. 1. Rock relief of Ardashir I in Darabgerd (Hinz 1969)

information simultaneously, the current authors intended to achieve a more realistic knowledge about the identity of the Iranian high-ranking character in front of the king at the rock relief of Darabgerd using a “historical approach” and a “comparative pictureology”.

### The rock relief of Ardashir I in Darabgerd (Fig. 1)

About 10 km southwest of Darab, above a spring and a pond, full of reeds, a rock relief belonging to the Sassanid period has been engraved (Hinz 1969). The general view of this rock relief can be described as follows: the Sassanid king is seen riding on a horse in the center of the scene. Beside the hoof of the king's horse, a lifeless body has been depicted. In front of the king, two Roman grandees are standing and on the left side, the royal guard and the Sassanid courtiers have been depicted. The right side of the reliefs has been devoted to the Roman corps. The king has put his left hand on the Roman character and this person, in an ashamed posture, has raised his right hand as a sign of surrender; as if he seeks the Sassanid king's forgiveness and pardon. Next to him, a young man, with a vest, a skirt, a cape on his shoulders and a belt hanging from his waist, is standing while he has stretched out his hands towards the king. Behind him, there is an Iranian nobleman without any hat with a short beard (Fig. 2) seems to be leading the

captive Roman Caesar towards the Sassanid king and a chariot has been depicted behind him.

According to Walter Hinz, the Iranian man standing in front of the king on the right side of the rock relief (Fig. 2) is Bidaxš of Shapur, the commander of the armed forces (Hinz 1969). On the right side of the rock relief, some Persian men have been depicted in four rows; each of the two lower rows is consisted of five people and each of the two upper rows is consisted of four people. Among them, only the individuals in the third row have been depicted without any hats (Fig. 1).

Before dealing with the pictureology of the Persian high-ranking man who is standing in front of the king on this rock relief, it should be noted that researchers have not reached a consensus on the identity of the Sassanid king shown in this rock relief. Some believe that this character is Shapur I (Hinz 1965: 156-158; Stein 1950: 194-196; Girshman, 1962; Vanden Berghe 1959) and some others assumed this character to be the Ardashir I (Hermann 1969: 63-81; Dalia 1992: 161-180; Macdermot 1954: 76-78; Lukonin 1969; Mousavi Haji 1995:130-151). The authors of the current research follow the view of attributing the mentioned rock relief to Ardashir I.

Regarding the characterology of the Iranian high-ranking individuals in this rock relief, researchers have merely mentioned the individuals in the royal guard, the





Fig. 2. The discussed figure in a cross-cut of the rock relief of Ardashir I in Darabgerd (Hinz 1969)

grandees and courtiers (Lukonin 1969), and as a result, their characterology according to the attribution of the rock relief to the Ardashir I is questionable. Since the commander in front of the king lacks any special symbol, ascertaining his characterology is difficult. However, referring to the historical narratives associated with the functional domain of the ranks of Bidaxš and Hazārpat, the position of the mentioned ranks in inscriptional evidence and also the comparative pictureology, the authors state their personal perceptions about the identity of the discussed figure. Contrary to Hinz who has attributed this figure to Bidaxš of Shapur, as the commander of the armed forces, the authors have investigated the ranks such as Bidaxš, Hazārpat, Sepahbod, and Asbbod in the Ardashir I inscription on Ka'ba-ye Zartosht to determine their functional nobility, and clarify the superiority of the military ranks in Ardashir and Shapur's lists of courtiers.

Bidaxš is one of the featured titles in the Sassanian period which has been used differently in the languages spoken from the first to the eighth centuries AD. In Armenian language, this title has been mentioned as "bdeašx" by some historians such as "Agathangelos" and "Fastus". In Georgian language, various forms of this word including pythš, bthš, pitiāxē, bthšy, and byty'hš are seen. In the Latin references of the fourth century CE, this word has been referred to as "vitaxa" (Sunderman 1990:242-43). Based

on the initial letter "p", some etymologists believe this word means "king/powerful", or in another interpretation, this word means the eye of the king. The second group of etymologists who believe that the initial phoneme of this word is "b" argue that Bidaxš means the second ruler or vice-regent (Sunderman 1990:243-44).

With respect to the fact that prior to this time, the rank of Bidaxš has meant "the holder of the highest and most important rank" after the king in Georgia, it seems that in the Sassanian court, this title has represented the king's assistant or deputy, though, perhaps, the eminence and highness of this rank was somewhat reduced, such that the holder of this rank had governed the handling of the state and military tasks of the king (Frye 1963). According to the position of this title in inscriptional evidence of the third century CE, where it has been represented after the titles of the Sassanian kings and princes, interpreting this title as "vice-regent", "chancellor", and "the grand vizier" at the top of the state ranks is closer to reality.

According to Lukonin (1983), the rank of Bidaxš is only observed under the Sassanians until the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. This position is usually granted to the individuals attributed to the royal families or representatives of very well-known clans; so that during the reigns of Yazdgerd III and Bahram IV, Mehr Nerseh and Soren Pahlav held this rank. The above-mentioned rank represented the kings' general counsel and the domain of his authorities has been very extensive (Diakonoff 1961). It was the duty of the Grand Vizier to handle the entirety of the affairs of the country under the king's supervision, though he performed most of the duties of the rank at his sole discretion; thus, when the king was absent, he was the vice-regent (Grousset and Masse 1952). The holder of this rank ran the political affairs and civil measures, signed the contracts and occasionally undertook high command of troops in wars (Ghirshman 1976). This rank was also at the top of all the ministries or courts run by secretaries (Javadi 2001:234). Despite the prominent position of the Grand Vizier, and regarding the fact that this rank has been the highest state position after the king, its influence and power in the Sassanian administrative system fluctuated over time so that during the Khosrow Anushiruwān reign, the authorities of this rank were reduced (Ibn al-Balkhi 1921).

In Ardashir I and Shapur I's lists of courtiers in Ka'ba-ye Zartosht inscription, name of a person called "Pāpak Hazārpat" has been mentioned whose position has been only one rank after Bidaxš (Wieschöfer 1996). The sequence of the mentioned titles in Pāikuli inscription of Nerseh has also remained the same as what has been mentioned in Ka'ba-ye Zartosht inscription (Nasrollahzade 2005:31-34). Hazārpat, in Iran, has its own root meaning, i.e. the head of a thousand people (Daryaei 2009). According to Lukonin (1983), Hazārpat has been a military title which means the commander of a thousand people, or in other words, it means the commander of the royal guard. Some

researchers believe that the grand vizier has been apparently titled Hazārpat (Nöldeke 1879); so that Yazdgerd granted the minister position to the sage Nerseh of his time and gave him the title of Hazārpat (Ibn al-Athir 1998). Another title of “Mehr Nerseh” was “Vuzorgfarmzār” which means the minster of the minsters (al-Tabari 1987). Armenian historians have also referred to Mehr Nerseh, the grand vizier of Yazdgerd III’s court, as Hazārpat of Iran and Aniran; and Mehr Nerseh in a letter to the Armenians, has introduced himself as Vuzorgfarmzār of Iran and Aniran. During the Achaemenid era, the rank of Hazārpat was attributed to the officers of units of one thousand soldiers units related to an immortal ten-thousand-soldier army; one of these units has had the duty to protect the king’s life. This special royal guard was headed by the second-ranked official of the country, i.e. the Grand Vizier. Indeed, the grand vizier of the Achaemenid court also held the title of Hazārpat (Ehtesham 1977: 76-80).

During the Khosrowan era, the title of Hazārpat continued to be used, although this title was no longer considered among the Grand Vizier’s titles, it was applied with its original meaning, namely, the royal guards (Javadi 2001:329). Sigillographic evidence from the second half of the sixth century CE indicates the existence of a seal belonging to Iran Sepahbad of the western Kust who held the title of Hazārpat (Gyselen 2001). Rejecting the attribution of the title of Hazārpat to the Grand Vizier in the early Sassanian period, the authors would point out that according to inscriptional evidence, the title of Bidaxš represents the position of the vice-regent and that the Grand Vizier ranked higher than that of Hazārpat. Therefore, the existence of a position with two titles and positional variation in one court is irrational. Hence, the functional authenticity of Bidaxš and Hazārpat under the same position of “grand vizier” cannot be assumed to be the same. Thus, the aforementioned notion contradicts the attribution of Hazārpat title to the grand vizier in the early Sassanian period.

It is noteworthy that Hazārpat title underwent its own process of functional transformation during the Sassanian reign; that is, during the first period of its functional confusion, it has been merely a military position. Subsequently, in the middle of this period, Hazārpat held the state and military positions simultaneously. During the late period, however, Hazārpat regained its military nature (Mousavi Haji and Khorashadi 2014). In Ardashir I’s list of courtiers in Ka’ba-ye Zartosht inscription, there is mention of a character called the “Raxš Sepahbad”, occupying a position much lower than that of the Bidaxš or Hazārpat. Also, on the Nerseh inscription at Pāikuli, the name and title of Raxš Sepahbad have been mentioned similarly to that which existed during Ardashir’s reign (Nasrollahzade 2005: 31-34). According to some researchers, the greatest military rank in the inscriptions of the third century CE was the commandership position, namely Sepahbad (Tafazzoli 2000).

Frye (1984) maintains that in Shapur I inscription in Ka’ba-ye Zartosht, one is faced with a combination of individuals’ names, some of whom have been mentioned due to their attribution to a particular clan and some of whom have been appointed to thanks to their positions. He argues that the title of Sepahbad in these inscription has been a military title which means “commander of army”. Inconsistent with Frye’s view, Parikhanian (1983) believes that Raxš Sepahbod, in Ardashir I’s list of courtiers, was one of the characters related to the clan of Sepahbad; although he has avoided mentioning his reasons for such an attribution, in Shapur I’s list of courtiers in Ka’ba-ye Zartosht inscription, the title of “Piruz Aspbad” has been mentioned as the commander-in-chief of the horde-riders or the cavalry commander after the rank of Hazārpat (Frye 1956: 330; Back 1978: 357; Chaumont 1973: 145; Christiansen 1944). This title does not exist in Ardashir I’s list of courtiers. In contrast to the views of some researchers (Tafazzoli 2000) who have considered the rank of Sepahbad to be the greatest military rank in Ardashir I’s list of courtiers, the current authors cite the very same list as well as Shapur I’s list of courtiers on Ka’ba-ye Zartosht inscription.

The significance of investigating these military titles is due to the lack of our understanding of the Sepahbad title, presumably meaning army commander, during Shapur I’s reign. Prior to his reign, this position was mentioned in a much lower position than Hazārpat, for example, in Shapur’s father’s list of courtiers. Therefore, if we consider Sepahbad as a military position representing the commander of the army in Ardashir I’s list of courtiers, then it cannot be thought to have a position lower than Hazārpat rank (commander of the royal guard). Also, the complete removal of this position during Shapur I’s reign, when a more complicated organization with more military positions prevailed in the government, seems to be very unlikely. In his list of courtiers, the title of “Aspbad”, which has been hierarchically inferior to the commander of the army (?), has been mentioned after the title of Hazārpat. Hence, in Ardashir I’s list of courtiers, Sepahbad has not been posed as a military position, but it implies the nobility of the holder of the mentioned title.

With respect to the foregoing discussion and also in accordance with the functional background of the Hazārpat title during the Achaemenid period, the military nature of this title in Ka’ba-ye Zartosht inscription is undeniable. On the other hand, according to its privileged position in the list of courtiers, this position has been superior to all the other military positions. Therefore, it has been the highest rank observed in the Sassanian historical documents, i.e. the inscriptions of the third century CE. Bidaxš as the “vice-regent” and the second person in the country, has been a state position and it has, in fact, represented the chancellor of the government; except in some special cases where Bidaxš held the position of the army’s high-command.



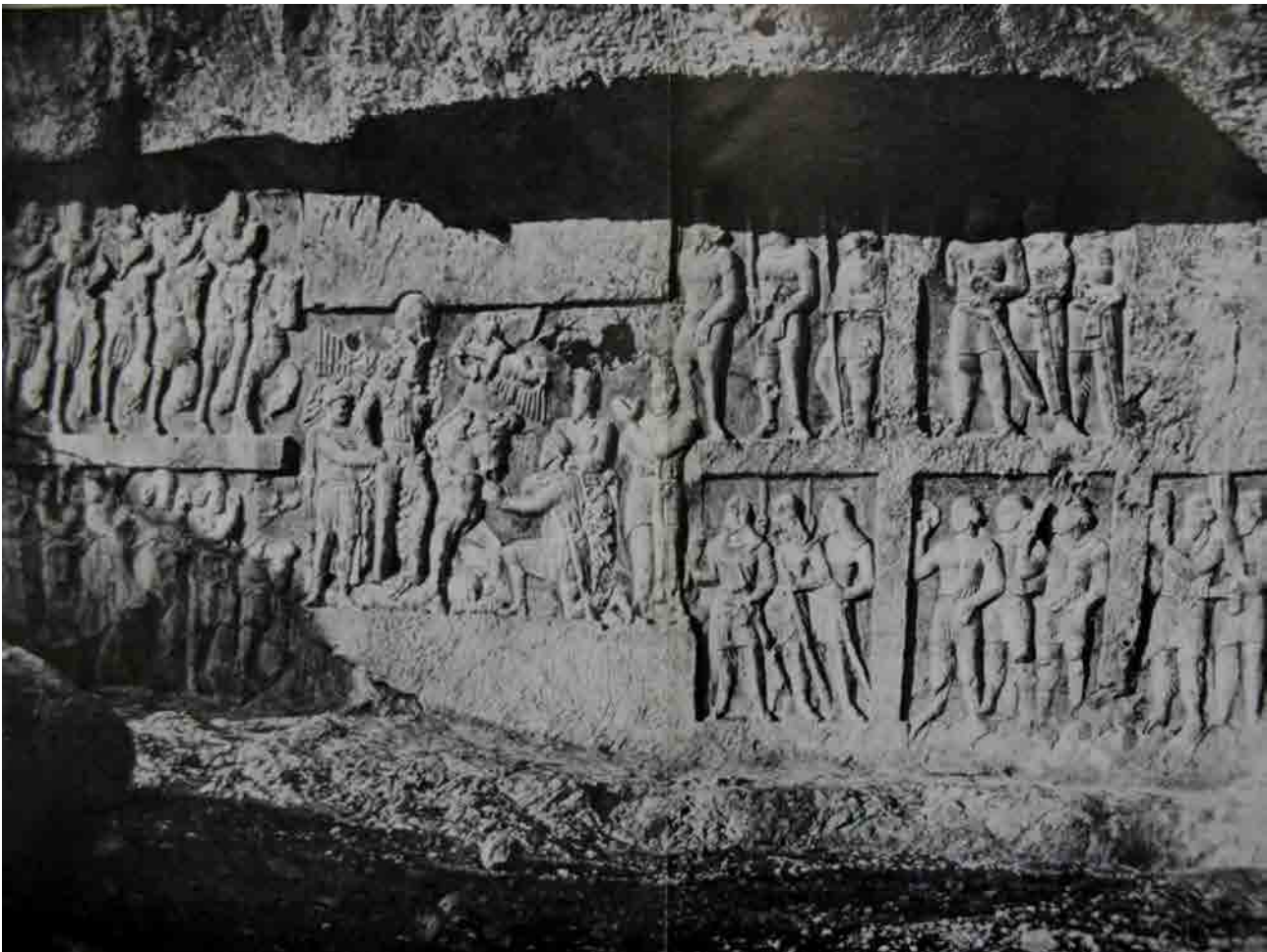


Fig. 3. The rock relief of Shapur I at Bishapur (Girshman 1976)

Contrary to Hinz's (1969) view discussed in the beginning lines of this paper, it seems very unlikely that in those wars depicted in Darabgerd rock relief, the Bidaxš was the commander of the armed forces; according to the historical narratives, from 237 AD onward, the commandship of the Iranian corps has been undertaken by Shapur, Ardashir's son (Lukonin 1969). Even assuming that Hinz has argued that the king attending at this rock relief is Shapur I (Hinz 1969), commandship of the corps would not be in contradiction with his kingship, because according to historical evidence (Javadi 2001:329), the king, himself, was at the top of the military organization in the Sassanian era. He was the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and he undertook the commandship of the corps in big wars.

With reference to what has been stated previously, the person discussed in Darabgerd rock relief must have been an individual with the power of military commandship. Referring to Ardashir and Shapur's lists of courtiers in Ka'ba-ye Zartosht inscription (Nasrollahzade 2005: 31), the authors argue that the highest military rank has been

"Pāpak Hazārpat" serving as the commander of the special royal guard. This position is ranked as the ninth position and after Bidaxš of Ardashir. According to the fact that the honor of leading the captive Roman Caesar for doing obeisance must have belonged to a military high-ranking position rather than a low-ranking soldier, and given the fact that the guard commanded by Hazārpat was the closest guard to the king which has been also responsible for protecting the king's life, the attribution of the rank of Hazārpat to the discussed figure seems logical. In the following, with reference to the comparative pictureology, other reasons for this attribution are provided.

In the images remained of the rank of Bidaxš, this character has always appeared with a hat on his head. In most cases, the form of this hat is in such a way that its top is slightly curved forward; as if this form of headgear has been a part of the uniform specific to the rank of Bidaxš, whereas the discussed figure displayed in Darabgerd rock relief lacks any hat or any representing symbols badges. The artwork referred to in the comparative pictureology to display the images of Bidaxš include:

- The rock relief of Shapur I at Bishapur
- The rock reliefs of Bahram II at Bishapur, Bahram relief, Naqš-i Rostam
- A metal vessel attributed to Bidaxš Pāpak

**The rock relief of Shapur I at Bishapur (Fig. 3)**

The three victories of Shapur III over the Romans Gornianus, Phillip the Arab, and Valerian, have been depicted in this rock relief. In the central relief, the



Fig. 4. The rock relief of Shapur I at Bishapur (the middle part of the assembly). (Hinz 1969)



Fig. 5. A vessel attributed to Bidaxš Pāpak (Hinz 1969)





Fig. 6. The rock relief attributed to Bidaxš Pāpak in Sarāb-e Bahram (Hinz 1969)

great king riding on a horse is trampling the dead body of Gordian III on the ground. In front of him, Philipp the Arab is kneeling and begging him in order to regain the peace and reconciliation. The Roman emperor, Valerian, appears behind the Sassanian king who is holding his hand. It is noteworthy that researchers have not yet reached to a consensus on the identity of the Roman emperors as mentioned above. Behind Philipp the Arab, two other Persian grandees are standing. The second person who has raised his hands in an unusual manner, is wearing a special hat whose top is slightly curved forward (Fig. 4). Various statements have been made on the characterology of this figure. Walter Hinz (1969) identifies this character as a government high-ranking character since he does not have the same beard as that of princes and he has raised his both hands, but not to display the familiar posture as a sign of respect with a bent figure. He maintains that this character is Bidaxš of Shapur who has raised his hands in front of the king as a sign of congratulation. Herzfeld (1941), in identifying the above-said person's identity, merely introduces him as a Sassanian minister. Georgiana Herman (1969: 81) believes that he has been Bahram, Shapur's son. Mousavi Haji (1995: 167) has argued that the absence of the special symbol of Gilan Shah on the discussed person's

hat is an argument against definitely accepting Herman's view.

Making a definite statement regarding the identity of this individual is very difficult, since no symbol or badge has been depicted on his hat. Hence, through some artistic conventions, his identity can be determined only through speculation. However, among the provided views, Hinz's (1969) standpoint in attributing the Bidaxš position to the discussed figure seems to be more reasonable. The authors believe that the cross-section of the broken point of this person's hat is much more than what is typically seen in the pointed hats called Phrygian headgear; so that it even makes one suspect that perhaps this hat may have been a kind of animal-headed hats, some hats which have been specific to the members of the royal family. According to the fact that the royal family members have been exempted from saluting the king in a symbolic manner in which the hands are raised, therefore, the likelihood for existence of an animal-headed hat for this person is weakened.

On the other hand, if a royal family member was to have the honor of saluting the king, who could be more deserving than the crown prince who is standing prior to this person? In addition, there is a general similarity among the discussed person's hat and Bidaxš Pāpak's hat in Armazian silver vessel (Fig. 5) and the rock relief of Bahram II at Naqš-e Bahram (Fig. 6) which will be discussed later. It seems that this form of hat with a forward curve may have been the signal form of the holder of Bidaxš rank. Hence, the mentioned person who has raised his hands as a sign of congratulation in front of the king, according to Shapur's list of courtiers in Ka'ba-ye Zartosht inscription, is very likely to be the Bidaxš of Shapur, the highest state rank.

### The rock relief of Shapur I at Bishapur (Fig. 7)

In the central image of this rock relief, Shapur's three triumphs are depicted. In the middle of this rock relief and in front of Shapur, beside Philip the Arab, two individuals are standing one of whom is wearing an Iranian long hat and the second person is presenting the ring of victory to the king (Fig. 8). Walter Hinz (1969) believes that this character who has stretched his hand towards the conqueror king is the "Bidaxš of Shapur".

The damage inflicted to this rock relief has made it relatively impossible to investigate the clothing and appearance of the second individual. Thanks to the design remained of it (Fig. 9), in accordance with Hinz's characterology, the authors have made their statements as follows:

Investigation of this character's clothing shows that this character was undoubtedly a Sassanian. Hence, we must search for an individual in the Sassanian hierarchical system who has deserved attending in this rock relief in front of the king. As it was pointed out previously, according



Fig. 7. The rock relief of Shapur I at Bishapur (photo by authors)

to the list provided in Ka'ba-ye Zartosht inscription (Nasrollahzade 2005:31), after the princes and members of the royal family, the highest rank belonged to Bidaxš. With regard to the almost certain presence of Bidaxš of Shapur in the other relief of Shapur's victory previously

mentioned and also the similarity seen in the posture of these two figures when congratulating and paying tribute to the conqueror king, Hinz's (1969) interpretation about the mentioned individual's identity seems to be closer to the reality. If one of the princes or a member of the royal



Fig. 8. The rock relief of Shapur I at Bishapur (Hinz 1969)





Fig. 9. Drawing of the rock relief of Shapur I at Bishapur (Nasrollahzade 2005:331)

family was supposed to have the honor of presenting the ring of victory to the king, the most plausible candidate for this purpose could have been the crown prince who is standing before this character.

#### **The rock relief of Bahram II at Bishapur (Fig. 10)**

This artwork displays a scene demonstrating a victory over the enemy and consists of two registers, one at the top and the other one at the bottom. The Sassanian king has been depicted in the center of the upper part of this rock relief. On his right side, six Iranian commanders in-chief have been depicted in full-height profile and four other people have been depicted only in half-body profile. All these people have kept their right hands in front of their faces and raised their forefingers as a sign of respect. Their clothes include short gowns reaching down to their knees and are narrowed by belts fastened at their waists. These individuals are wearing loose trousers and round hats. Among them, three individuals are wearing long hats, which curve slightly forward (Fig. 10). The authors maintain that in case we intend to find the royal family

members in this rock relief, we should logically look at the right side of the king. Since all the characters on the king's right side have raised their right hands in front of him as a sign of respect, therefore, they cannot be the members of the royal family. Most likely, they have been state officials, rather than military high-ranking officers. This idea originates from the different placements and postures of the people on the right side of the king; this may suggest that there have been two groups of state and military ranks. What reinforces this interpretation is the fact that the characters on the left side of the king are military officials. It seems that as the stonecutting operation was not completed, the details such as special symbols, decorative arrays and clothing details were not fully depicted. This makes it difficult to identify and determine the identities of the people attending at the rock relief. However, it is justifiable to take the presence of the first-ranking officials such as Kartir and Bidaxš and also the representatives of the great clans for granted. Hence, based on speculation and according to the order of the positions, the second figure of this group can be thought to be Bahram II (Fig. 11) who has held the second highest state rank after Kartir.



Fig. 10. The rock relief of Bahram II at Bishapur (Girshman 1976).

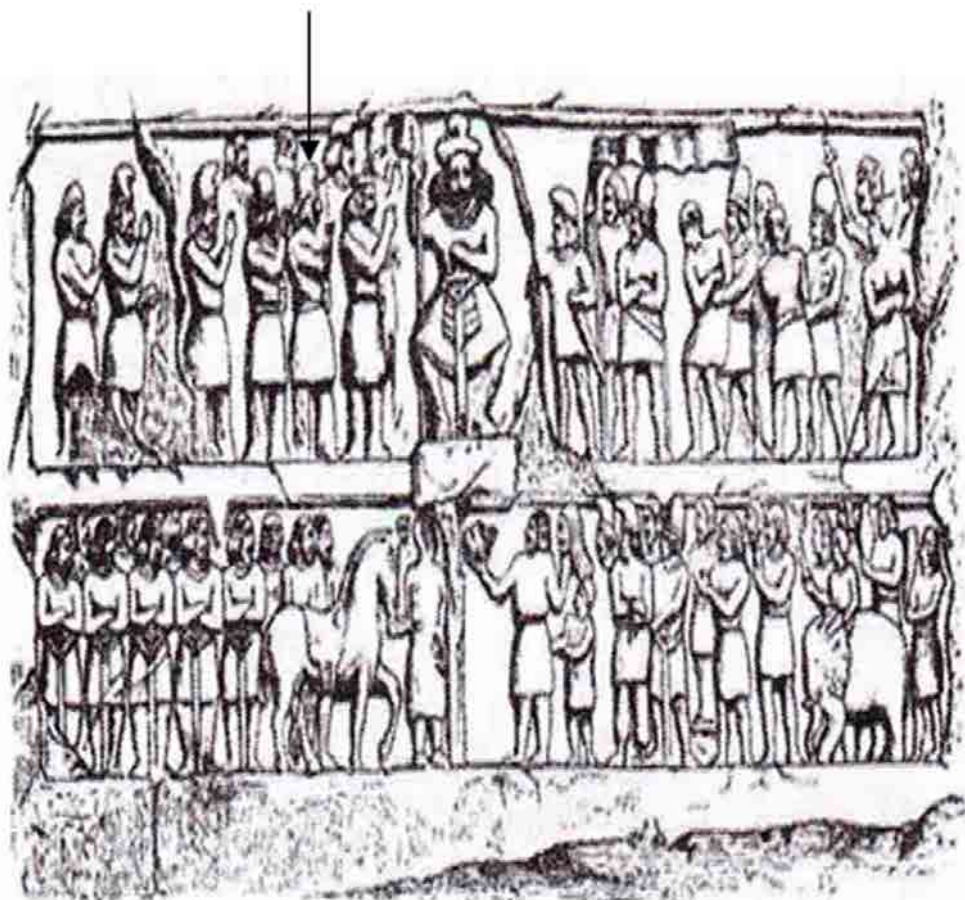


Fig. 11. The figure ascribed to Bidaxš (Daryaei 2009)



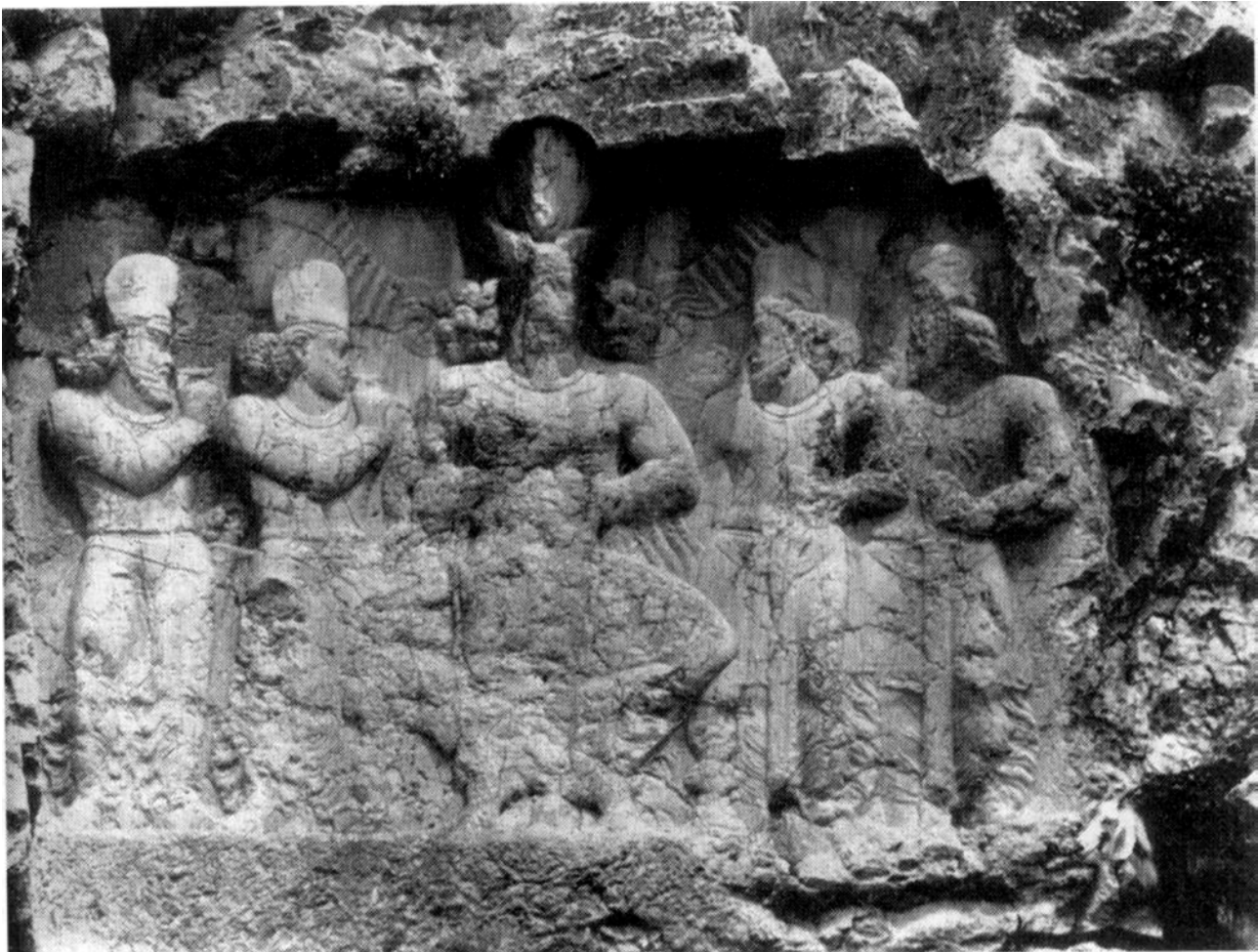


Fig. 12. The rock relief of Bahram II in relief (Hinz 1969)

Also, in this rock relief, a figure suspected to be Bidaxš has been depicted with a hat on his head.

#### The rock relief of Bahram II at Bishapur (Fig. 12)

In this relief, the king has been depicted with a crown on his head on both sides of which there are eagle-wings and represents deity of triumph “VaraOrağna”. At the top of the crown, there is a huge glob and two rising ribbons at its back. The king is sitting on his throne in a forward posture and has put his both hands on his sword hilt which is vertically placed between his legs. Four members of the courtiers are surrounding him and have bent their forefront as a sign of respect. Hinz (1969) argues that the person behind Kartir who was the second most powerful person after him, is the Bidaxš of Bahram (Fig. 13) since he is also standing on the right side of the king. According to the contents of Nerseh inscription at Pāikuli, which suggest that at the end of Bahram II’s reign, there was a person called Pāpak holding the rank of Bidaxš, he argues that this person is Pāpak, the grandson of Ardashir’s Bidaxš during

Bahram I’s reign. This person appears wearing a hat with a symbol of crescent and star in Bahram relief at Naqš-i Rostam (Fig. 14).

Yet, here, the symbol on his hat is the leaves of *laurus nobilis* (Laurel tree); as Hinz argues, the reason for representing this symbol is his promotion to Bidaxš of Iran while maintaining his simultaneous position at the Satrap of Georgia (Fig. 13). Regarding this issue, he writes, “The Armazian silver vessel supports this assumption that Pāpak, the Satrap of Georgia, promoted to the Bidaxš of Iran, and hence, the symbol on his hat was changed. This vessel bearing a Pahlavi text, clearly displays Pāpak with his familiar hat and symbol, i.e. the symbol of crescent and star. At this time, he was the Satrap of Georgia and the supporting reason for his symbol change associated with this position is the Armazian silver vessel. He is holding a leafy bud in his right hand, not to smell it (as he has held this bud upper than his nose), rather, in my opinion, this is a symbolic indication of his happiness due to this promotion (Fig. 15; Hinz 1969).





Fig. 13. Bidaxš Pāpak in the rock relief of Bahram II at Naqsh-e Bahram (Hinz 1969)



Fig. 14. Satrap of Georgia in the rock relief of Bahram II at Naqsh-e Rostam (Hinz 1969)



Fig. 15. A vessel ascribed to Bidaxš Pāpak (Hinz 1969)



Lukonin (1969) argues that the second person on the king's right side belongs to the well-known clan of Qāren (Fig. 13), as evidenced by his special symbol. Khorashadi (2015) has pointed out that despite the fact that Lukonin's characterology supports Hinz's idea that Pāpak Bidaxš belonged to the well-known clan of Qāren, his reference to the bud symbol on the person's hat is not acceptable since there is an obvious difference between these two buds one of which symbolizes the clan of Qāren and the other one represents the rank of Bidaxš (Khorashadi 2015: 116). On the other hand, despite the fact that the authors' view accords with Hinz's argument suggesting that the discussed figure represents a person holding the rank of Bidaxš, the existence of a blood kinship between Pāpak and Bidaxš of Ardashir and attribution of Bidaxš of Ardashir to the clan of Qāren is doubtful. The figure attributed to the rank of Bidaxš in this rock relief is also wearing a hat indicating a slight difference with hats of other high-ranking officials attending this relief in terms of the general form so that its top is slightly curved forward.

### **The Rock Relief of Bahram II at Naqš-i Rostam (Fig. 16)**

In this rock relief, Bahram II, who is recognizable with his Shahpari crown, has gathered the closest members of the court around himself. Three individuals standing behind the king and on the right side of the scene, raise their right hands as a sign of respect. The styles of their hair, beards, and the hats that they are wearing, indicate that they are among the courtiers and state high-ranking officials. On the other hand, the fact that they have achieved such an honor to be depicted on a relief where the king along with his family has been depicted is itself an obvious reason to demonstrate their high rank and position. Regarding the characterology of individuals standing behind the king, Lukonin (1969) with reference to the special symbol on the last person's hat (Fig. 14), introduces him as "Pāpak Bidaxš". Given the obsession which existed in the Sassanian ruling system to represent the order of ranks, the authors believe that it seems unlikely and irrational to



Fig. 16. The rock relief of Bahram II in Naqsh-e Rostam (Hinz 1969)



Fig. 17. A relief attributed to Bidaxš?  
in the rock relief of Bahram II at Naqsh-e Rostam (Hinz 1969)

conceive Bidaxš as the vice-regent of the country in the last position after other ranks.

This is itself an argument against Lukonin's view to conceive of the rank of Bidaxš for the last figure. Hinz (2006: 265, 284) believes that the individual standing after the king (Fig. 17) is a young man whose beard has not yet grown and he does not extend his argument beyond this; though elsewhere, he implicitly points to his rank of Bidaxš. However, he agrees with Lukonin in this assumption that the last person (Fig. 14) is Pāpak Bidaxš rather than viewing him as having the rank of Bidaxš. However, he believes that, here, this person is the "Satrap of Georgia", since his symbol is the "crescent and star" not a blossoming bud (Hinz 1969). We suggest that according to the long queue of the noblemen on the left side of the king in this relief, perhaps a position for Bidaxš of Bahram II can be considered.

Therefore, if we want to base the character's ranks upon the order of ranks, then, the first person on the king's left-hand side could be assumed to hold this rank (Fig. 17). On the other hand, if we ignore the fact that this character lacks any long and distinguished beard, as he is only a teenager, his hat resembles the one known for this rank in other artwork and rock reliefs, particularly

in terms of the forward curvature of the hat. The form of the character's unadorned hat lacking any symbols has covered the person's ears as the Median hats and its tail has been depicted differently from other tailed hats of noblemen. With reference to the representative symbols on these two noblemen's hats, displayed after this character, it seems unlikely that the vice-regent's hat would have been depicted without any adornments or symbols. In general, the appearance of this figure contradicts with his eminent rank and his manner of position behind the king. Hence, the idea of recognizing him as Bidaxš is undermined and his identity remains obscure.

### 7. The rock relief of Bahram II at Sarmashhad (Fig. 18)

In this rock relief, Bahram II appears with his winged crown on top of which there is a circular globe is killing a lion; behind him, three characters have been depicted. Regarding the last character's identity (the figure after the queen (Fig. 19)), Lukonin (1969) only mentions one of the noblemen. Herzfeld (1941) asserts that this character is the grand vizier. Vanden Berghe (1959: 52) and Ghirshman (1962: 364) have also followed this notion. Consistent with their view, Hinz (1969) also maintains that the character after the queen must be the Bidaxš of Bahram II, because he has raised his hand as a sign of respect for the royal family, and therefore, he cannot be a royal family member. In compliance with the mentioned scholars, we emphasize that the presence of Kartir, the Zoroastrian priest, (between the king and the queen (Fig. 19)) in this relief (Fig. 19) as the highest rank in Bahram II's court, reinforces the notion of Bidaxš's attendance as the second state power after Kartir. In addition, the comparative pictureology also assists us in this identification since the discussed figure is wearing a hat whose top has a forward curve like Pāpak Bidaxš's hat.

### The vessel attributed to Pāpak Bidaxš (Fig. 15)

This vessel has been discovered from a princess's grave in Armazia, the actual capital of Georgia located at 22 km north of Tbilisi (Harper 1981: 29-30). In the center of its inner surface, the half-body profile of a man is seen wearing a large hat whose top is inclined forward. According to Walter Hinz, the symbol of crescent and star on his hat can indicate that he was or had been a Satrap of Georgia. Indeed, he has been the same character depicted in rock relief of Bahram II at Naqš-i Rostam (Fig. 16) on the right side and he has also appeared with the same details and symbol of crescent and star in that relief too (Fig. 14); yet very soon later, probably in 292 AD, this character called Pāpak, while maintaining his previous rank, has been assigned the rank of Bidaxš in Iran and in order to show and announce his new and superior rank, he received a new symbol.



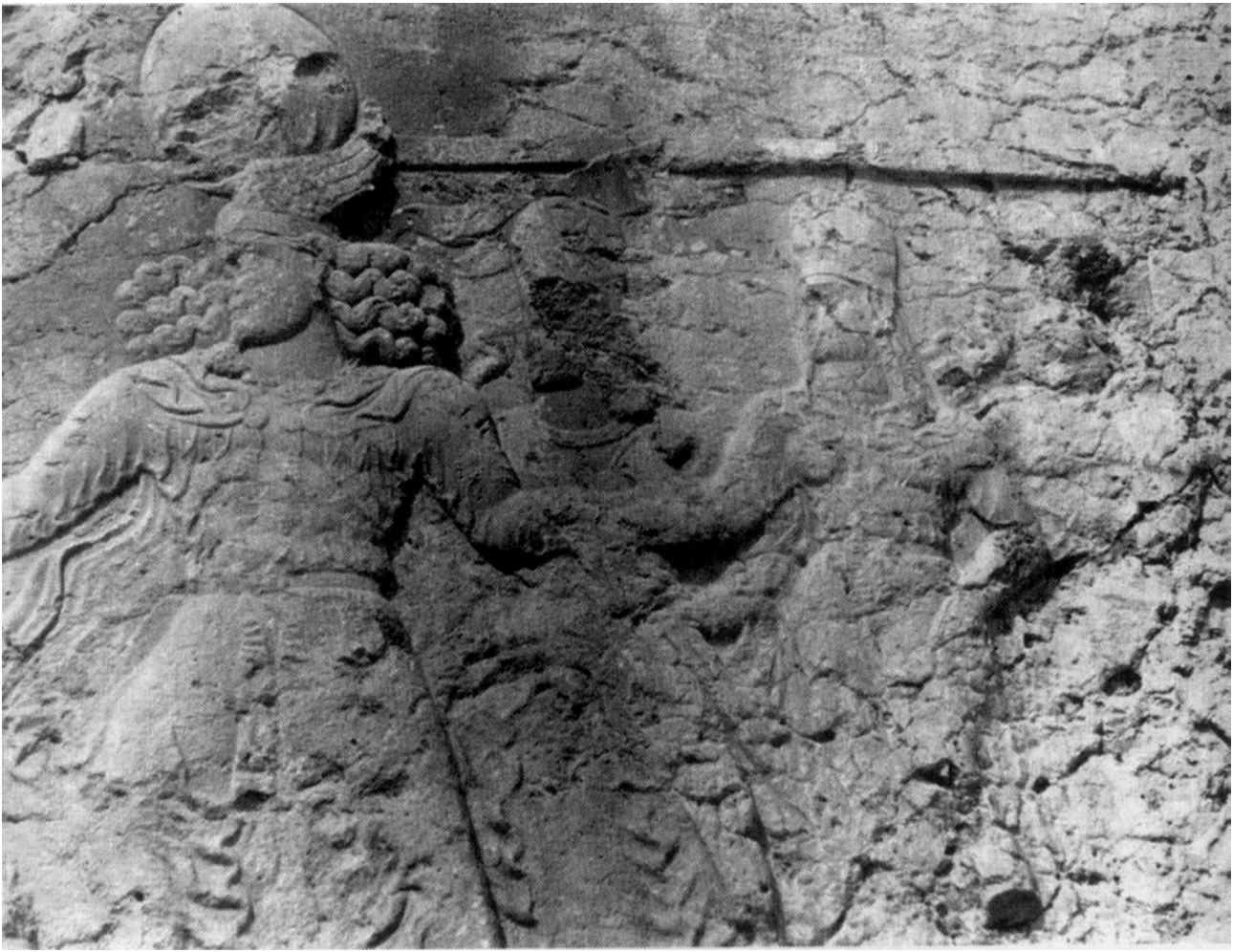


Fig. 18. The rock relief of Bahram II at Sar Mashhad (Hinz 1969)

Hence, in rock relief of Bahram II at Naqš-i Bahram (Fig. 12), a bud-like symbol has been depicted on his hat (Fig. 13). As mentioned previously, Hinz asserts that the Armazian cup provides evidence indicating the promotion of the rank of Pāpak from the Satrap of Georgia to the Bidaxš of Iran and he assumes that the bud this figure is holding in his hand connects these two representative symbols (Hinz 1969). Lukonin has also attributed this vessel to Pāpak Bidaxš (Lukonin 1969; Harper 1981: 29-30). Once more, we see that the Bidaxš of Iran has been depicted wearing a hat with a forward curve.

#### **The comparative pictureology of Darabgerd rock relief compared to the relief of Bahram II at Bishapur**

According to the similarities that exist between the Iranian commanders-in-chief as depicted on the Darabgerd rock relief (Fig. 2) and the high-ranking officials standing behind the king in the same relief (Fig. 1), in terms of their hair and beard styles, as well as their lack of hats, the characters in the third row may be assumed to be the

military commanders of the army. Another likelihood which can be assumed for their identity is that they may have been the representatives of the clans including Varaz, Soren, Xodavandegar Andigan, and Qāren as mentioned in Ka'ba-ye Zartosht (Nasrollahzade 2005:31-32).

However, it is not unlikely that both these states would have existed simultaneously. As evidenced by the historical narratives, despite the fact that the privileges of great clans are not truly known, what is obvious is that their powers were influential across the satrapies and their peasants also had to pay taxes to them in addition to what they paid to the government. In return, they supported and protected the kingship through their military force (Ghirshman 1976). If not with their own forces, they assisted the Sassanian central government in the recruitment of soldiers and reinforcing the military forces (Javadi 2001: 314-315). Moreover, when pointing to some of the inherited ranks during the Sassanian era, it has been stated that one of the seven clans was responsible for the supervision of military affairs (Christiansen 1944). Another clan held the responsibility of cavalry commandship, and the responsibility of looking



Fig. 19. no. 1. A figure attributed to Bidaxs (Nasrollahzade 2005: 343); no. 2. Kartir Figure (Nasrollahzade 2005: 343).

after the weapons and ammunition of the army was assigned to another famous clan of the dynasty (Iranian Society of Social Sciences 1971: 74). A glance at Ardashir's list of courtiers in the Ka'ba-ye Zartosht inscription indicates the rank of the head of influential clans in a time-sequence immediately subsequent to the rank of Hazārpat and in Shapur I's list of courtier with a rank difference after Piruz Espand (Cavalry Commander) (Nasrollahzadeh 2005: 31-32).

The assumption that the characters in the third row have been military officers is also reinforced by the comparative pictureology conducted between Darabgerd rock relief and relief of Bahram II's victory over Hormizd Sakanshah at Bishapur (Fig. 10). The presence of the king's horse in the lower part of the left side can also be considered a symbolic representation of the Sassanian cavalry. Therefore, the characters attending behind the king's horse must be the commanders-in-chief of the army. The style of their hair and beard and the lack of any hats are quite similar to those of the characters in the third row in Darabgerd rock relief (Fig. 1). This confirms the military nobility of the high-ranking individuals in the third row of Darabgerd rock relief and consequently, the military function of the

discussed figure. Thus, we reject the attribution of the rank of Bidaxš, the highest state rank, to the mentioned figure.

### Conclusion

Characterology of the figures depicted in memorial artwork becomes feasible through comparative study of the historical narratives with archaeological evidence. Historical texts provide the evidence for the domains of authority of the different named ranks as well as the existence, functional background and the equivalent terms for representing each rank. As such these sources can allow us to identify the identities of the characters present in various forms of memorial artwork. The historical content of the rock relief of Darabgerd displaying Ardashir I's triumph in the war against the Romans shifted the authors' mentality to identify the Iranian nobleman's identity in front of the king onto a military high-ranking position (Fig. 2). To follow this shift, the most authentic historical document related to this particular phase of the Sassanian era, Shapur I's inscription on Ka'ba-ye Zartosht, was investigated.

Walter Hinz (1969), in his characterology performed on the discussed figure, does not go beyond mentioning the



rank of Bidaxš of Shapur as the commander of the armed forces; in fact, he explicitly acknowledges the military function of the rank of Bidaxš. Despite some evidence from historical narratives, it turns out that only in some cases did the Bidaxš hold the responsibility of the high command of the army (Ghirshman 1976). Despite this, some narratives have pointed to the prominent role of Shapur as the commander of the Iranian army in campaigns. Even if, considering Hinz's (1969) opinion, it is hypothesized that the king attending at the rock relief of Darabgerd was Shapur I, his kingship rank would still not be in contradiction with his responsibility as the army's commander in these wars, since according to the historical narratives (Javadi 2001: 329), the kings have undertaken the commandship of their corps in their big wars. Regardless of this issue, we have focused on authentic documents such as inscriptional evidence because of the recess between the existence of the ranks and occurrence of events as well as the time in which they have been written, all of which may have deviated from the realities of the time period. According to the extreme obsession existing in the Sassanian ruling system with regard to the representation of the hierarchy of offices in the civil and military administration, the order of ranks in inscriptional evidence of Shapur I and Nerseh are the most valid and authentic documents to find out the functional nobility of the positions. However, to satisfy this objective, the comparative study between the inscriptional evidence and historical texts is unavoidable.

Unfortunately, what is inferred from the historical narratives (Ibn al-Athir 1998; Ehtesham 1955: 76-80; Noldeke 1879) about the rank of Hazārpat is that it is merely a title representing the prominent rank of Vuzorgfarmzār, or the very same Grand Vizier. Indeed, the nobility and functional background of this position has been implied in the title of Vuzorgfarmzār. This issue has resulted from the ignorance of most researchers about the functional confusion of the rank of Hazārpat during the Sassanian reign. Historical narratives merely point to the second stage of the functional transformation process of this particular rank, a stage concurrent with the mid-Sassanian period and attribution of the rank of Hazārpat to the Grand-Vizier of those days. Additionally, in rejecting the attribution of the rank of Hazārpat to the grand vizier in the early Sassanian era, it should be pointed out that the Grand Vizier could have been the very same Bidaxš attending in Shapur I and Nerseh's inscriptions. In other words, in the early Sassanian, the Grand Vizier was called Bidaxš.

Since it cannot be the case that the ranks of Bidaxš and Hazārpat co-existed in the office of the same person, the domain of their duties cannot be assumed to be identical under the position of Vuzorgfarmzār. Removing the term Bidaxš from the list of court ranks after the third century CE, this official's duties were mixed with those

of Hazārpat or with those of the Grand Vizier. In fact, it can be stated that Hazārpat, in the second phase of its functional confusion, was equivalent to the title of Bidaxš or the Grand Vizier; for this reason, historical narratives have thought this rank to have been the title of the grand vizier. With reference to arguments such as the posterior position of the rank of Hazārpat after the rank of Bidaxš in inscriptional evidence, the meaning of the term Hazārpat as the commander of the royal guard as well as its functional background during the Achaemenid dynasty, no doubt would be remained about the military nature of the mentioned rank. With respect to the hierarchy of the ranks of "Bidaxš", "Hazārpat", "Asbbod, Sepahbod" in Ka'ba-ye Zartosht and Pāikuli, the military superiority of the rank of Hazārpat is also confirmed. Thereby, the most rational choice for the discussed figure is the character of Pāpak Hazārpat, as the commander of royal guard.

Accrediting this view, we have conducted a comparative pictureology between the figures attributed to the rank of Bidaxš in some memorial artwork of this era and the discussed figure. The characterology of the persons has been occasionally performed with the aid of evidence and documents and occasionally through the artistic conventions. When investigating the figures attributed to the rank of Bidaxš, this character has been always depicted with a hat on his head. Additionally, the form of the hat is so that its top is slightly curved forward. It should be noted that the Sassanian artist, in creating memorial artwork has followed a realistic tradition; so that he has represented this realism in manifestations such as personal crowns, special hats, their style of hair, beard, clothing, special symbols, order of the ranks of the characters, the type of posture and crystallization in representation.

Emphasizing this important issue, we refer to the obsession of Sassanian artists in depicting the characters in Darabgerd relief either with hats or without hats. This sensitivity has been crystalized in representing the noblemen behind the king; as we can see, each one has been depicted with his own special uniform. This has been evidenced by the fourth character on the uppermost row (Fig. 1) who has been displayed without any hat, while the other characters in the same row are all wearing conical hats. The artist's preciseness in the realistic representations is to the extent that this has been even reflected in portraying the characters with or without beards.

Therefore, according to the evidence from other memorial artworks addressed in this discussion, it can be acknowledged that wearing a hat was considered as part of the formal uniform of the rank of Bidaxš. As the investigated figure is not wearing any hats, we must search for other points of comparison between this figure and other representations. As discussed above, there are many similarities between this figure and the other noblemen depicted in the third row of Darabgerd relief (Fig. 1)

particularly in their hairstyles, short beards and lack of hats. According to these common aspects, it would not be unlikely that they may have been the military commanders of Ardashir I's army. Indeed, Ardashir I and Shapur's lists of courtiers in Ka'ba-ye Zartosht suggest the eminent positions of the greatest and most reputable clans of the country after the rank of Hazārpat. On the other hand, according to historical narratives (Javadi 2001: 314-315), the reputable clans of the country assisted the kings in wars with their private armies, and in many cases, they have also undertaken the commandership of the corps. With reference to these arguments and also according to what the discussed figure has in common with the other noblemen in the third row in terms of their appearance, the military identity of the mentioned figure is increasingly reinforced. Another argument against Hinz's view is rooted in the differences between the type of posture and the function of the discussed character in Darabgerd relief (Fig. 2) and the type of posture and the theme of Bidaxš's presence in the rock relief of Shapur I at Bishapur (Figs. 4 and 8). Finally, it must be noted that the lack of any authentic evidence representing the identity of the investigated figure reduces the certainty of our characterology.

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