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COMBAT SCENES ON NAQSH-E ROSTAM AND ARCH OF GALERIUS. SOME NOTES ON THE COMMON FEATURES IN THE ROMAN AND IRANIAN ART OF LATE ANTIQUITY[1]

ABSTRACT   The battle scenes on the rock reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam and the Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki were made in comparable period which allows study of the correspondence of the motifs employed in both of them. Although both the Iranian rock reliefs and Roman art share significant amount of similarities, it is difficult to say that they are genetically connected. The analogies do not seem to result from direct influence between the cultures but should rather be explained by stemming from the shared tradition which is rooted in Assyrian visual formulae, adopted in Achaemenid and Greek art and finally spread in the Hellenism. Significantly, the heroic "icons" are blended in the crowded scenes on the Arch of Galerius which approximates them to the Hellenistic patterns and independent Roman tradition, while Iranian art represents preference towards emphasising their "iconic" rather than "narrative" nature. Prevalence for an "icon" or "heroic encounter" can be observed in Achaemenid art which allows to mark aesthetic continuity in Iranian tradition.

Key words: Combat scenes, the rock reliefs, Naqsh-e Rostam, Arch of Galerius, Thessaloniki, Roman art, Iranian art, Late Antiquity, Sasanian, Iran, Rome

ABSTRAKT   Sceny bitewne na sklanych reliefach w Naqsh-e Rostam i na Łuku Galeriusza w Tessalonikach wykonane zostały w podobnym okresie i pozwalają na dokonywanie studiów dotyczących pokrewieństwa motywów wykorzystanych na obu. Pomimo, że zarówno irańskie reliefy skalne i przykłady sztuki rzymskiej dzielą znaczącą ilość podobieństw, trudno mówić o związku genetycznym pomiędzy nimi. Analogie nie wydają się wynikać z bezpośredniego wpływu jednej kultury na drugą ale powinny być raczej wyjaśnione poprzez wspólną tradycję źródłową, która zakorzeniona jest w asyryjskich formułach wizualnych, zaadoptowanych w sztuce achemenidzkiej i greckiej a dalej rozpropagowanych przez wpływy hellenistyczne. Co wydaje się istotne, włączenie heroicznych „ikon" w gęste sceny bitewne na Łuku Galeriusza zbliża je do wzorów hellenistycznych i niezależnej tradycji rzymskiej. Tymczasem sztuka irańska reprezentuje silną tendencję ku akcentowania waloru „ikonicznego" raczej niż „narracyjnego", co możemy zaobserwować już w sztuce achemenidzkiej i co stanowiło cechę charakterystyczną irańskiej tradycji okresu imperialnego.

The depictions of the lance duels were one of the important subjects of the early Sasanian monumental rock reliefs. The scenes, as the vast majority of the Sasanian art, are formulaic, almost canonical and the seven examples allow to define four designs within which the reliefs vary in details. This formulaic nature of the scenes has not been, according to our knowledge, researched so far and the scholars tend to perceive the scenes as single genre. It is clear that the scenes of the mounted duels with lances are an important version of the Sasanian "heroic encounters" or "icons of violence" and that they relate to the wider group of the scenes of heroic combat, where a protagonist faces life-threatening of powerful animals, known from the Sasanian toreutics. Employment of the term "heroic encounters" created by Mark Garrison with regard of Achaemenid art,[2] "icons of violence", as defined by Skupniewicz,[3] is perfectly justified in this instance, as the victorious heroism

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[2] Garrison 2010.
[3] Skupniewicz 2018; Skupniewicz 2021b.

is a feature clearly present in both media, regardless whether the enemy is human or beast.

The compositional formulae of Sasanian "heroic encounters" refer to the formulae already existing, with the important but notable factor of the format to which particular scene was adjusted. Out of necessity the scenes on the silver plates had to be fitted into round shape of the vessel, enforcing them into compact and tight designs. The rock reliefs, on the other hand, even though lacking any actual frames, are more spacious and their pictorial fields are defined in horizontal rectangles. The exception here would be the left scene on the Firusabad relief which is compact, however it seems rather marginal part of three scene composition, an addendum to the more important parts of what was designed as multi-scene composition but, as per the principles of the image-building of the time, made of three separated, almost independent scenes.[4] That tendency to avoid multi-figural compositions in depictions of heroic violence in the Sasanian art might illustrate a drive towards an "icon" rather than "narrative" in the aesthetics of the era.[5] What seems significant, similar tendency is observable in Achaemenid iconography of violence and is present in the Parthian art, however due to the very small amount of examples, it is impossible to determine if it was dominating. The remnants of the wall-paintings from Old Nisa evidence the existence of the battle depictions consisting of interwoven scenes of possible battle narrative.[6]

What is certainly significant in understanding Sasanian decorum is a fact that the scenes on the silverware do not depict combat with humans, while among the Sasanian rock reliefs only Sar Mašhad and a smaller one from Haft-Tanān Museum of Shiraz show combat with the lions.[7] The relief in Rag-e Bibi does not have any indisputable Sasanian features that cannot be included in a study of the Sasanian aesthetics. This lack of the Sasanian forms was attempted to be explained by its alleged uniqueness or make by the local artisans, however far more plausible explanation seems dating of the relief to the late Kushan era.[8]

Despite the difference in the formats, the scenes from the toreutics decoration share common sources which can be traced back to Achaemenid designs, of which some stem in the elements of the Assyrian compositions.[9] The compositional formulae remained popular in Hellenistic era an inspired Roman iconography in the west.[10]

The relation between the Sasanian reliefs in Naqsh-e Rostam and the battle scene from the arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki has been already noted by Matthew Canepa and interpreted as one of evidences of exchange of the elements of the visual language between two great powers of Late Antiquity.[11] This valid, to great extent, observation clearly proves shared forms of expression and values, however the question arises whether the similarities between these two monuments must be necessarily interpreted as an evidence of direct Iranian influence. In our opinion the resemblance comes from relation to shared sources rather than transfer of forms between the empires.

The important factor which Canepa seemingly omitted in interpretation is the fact that there are three battle reliefs on the Arch of Galerius, and that there are seven survived Sasanian rock reliefs where the composition survived, so the comparison should be made between the groups, not the single reliefs. Also, the reliefs need to be analysed properly within their own visual traditions to determine their iconographic connections.

The mounted "heroic encounters"
in the early Sasanian rock reliefs

The surviving scenes of heroic mounted victory against mounted oponent in the early Sasanian art follow four image building principles. It is possible that the badly weathered reliefs from Rayy[12] could have included yet another variety, however the Sasanian aesthetics preferred limited formulae of image-building and the clear principle of showing the winner in calm, composed posture, with the back straight, while the adversary more dynamically, which emphasises his defeat, allows

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4 von Gall sees there one battle scene: Gall von 2008.

5 The dichotomy of "icon" vs. "narrative", see: Cohen 1997: 147-152.

6 Pilipko 2001: 275-277; Pilipko 2006.

7 Ghasemi 2022.

8 Skupniewicz 2022a; Maksymiuk, Kubik, Skupniewicz 2020; on Sasanian attribution of the relief: Grenet 2006; Grenet, Lee, Martinez 2007; Levine, Plekhov

2019; Canepa 2013. Levine and Plekhov list number of the features which do not relate to Sasanian art but explain them in terms of "uniqueness".

9 Skupniewicz 2018; Skupniewicz 2020; Skupniewicz, Lichota 2017.

10 Skupniewicz 2018; Maksymiuk, Skupniewicz 2024.

11 Canepa 2009: 93-95.

12 von Gall 1990: 36-37.

Fig. 1. Firusabad Frieze. Photo by Milad Vandaee (January 2008)
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restricted amount of applied options. It is safe to assume that the not preserved examples were likely to include one of the listed below visual formulae. All of them include the protagonist riding a horse depicted in the flying gallop, holding the long lance two handed on the hips level across the mount's neck. As the partially lost reliefs use the same way of depiction, it is very plausible that the other part followed one of the patterns.

The enemy falling with his horse tumbling. This formula can be observed on the central and right scenes of Firusabad frieze (Fig. 1) and NRm7 relief (Fig. 2).[13] The body of the horse of the defeated warrior is shown diagonally, almost vertically, with the head down. One of mount's hind legs is spread backwards while the other sharply bent under the belly. Although the state of the Firusabad frieze does not allow determination of

the position of the heads or front legs of the horses, it is likely that the formula followed the pattern represented on NRm7, where one of the legs is spread forward and the other sharply bent back. Such pose of the victim is attested in the decorations of the Sasanian silver or side relief in Tāq-e Bostān where it is applied to killed beasts, but it is also present on the bone plaque from Orlat,[14] in the battle context however not in the discussed formula. Similar pose is used in depictions of the bulls in the Western Mithraic scenes of tauroctony.[15] The position of the horse is therefore well-recognisable and associated with the victims however such a diagonal, almost vertical direction is rather rare. On Tāq-e Bostān scene and the plate from al-Sabah collection the boars are shown diagonally with their heads down but directed towards the hunter,

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[13] von Gall 1990: 20-29, 31-33; von Gall 2008; Grabowski 2009: 20-22; Grabowski 2011; Skupniewicz 2015b; Skupniewicz 2021b.

[14] Abdullaev 1995a; Abdullaev 1995b; Ilyasov, Rusanov 1997-1998; Nikonorov, Hudyakov 1999; Pugachenkova 1987.

[15] see: Skupniewicz 2025.

Fig. 2. Naqš-e Rōstam NRm7 relief. Photo by Pentocelo.
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not escaping from him.[16] The plate from al-Sabah collection comes from the antiquity market and contain number of surprising features, if considered from structural image-building perspective, which must set from the local manufacturing traditions, however it is one of the closest analogies for the position of the horse in the discussed formula.

In all cases the losing personage was hit about lower back area, however the defeated rider is an element which varies in all three examples of the formula. On the central scene in Friusabad, he is shown with his hands down, almost sitting on the tumbling horse, looking back at the victor (Fig. 1). On the left scene of the same relief, he is shown twisted down with his arms stretched over his head

which in turn is directed downwards which is emphasising the dramatic helplessness of his situation and great energy which hurled the heavy armoured man and his horse like the rag-dolls. The defeated rider is holding his lance with just a butt visible, directed towards the victor. The NRm5 relief shows the falling rider with diagonally down, with his knees and elbows bent, attempting to raise his head. He is holding the broken lance directed with a butt towards the protagonist.

It has been noted by von Gall that the protagonist defeat the fleeing opponents, so the formula would be the climax of the chase,[17] however in the Iranian mounted combat manoeuvrability and dexterity seemed a key role, so one might expect encircling movements which could allow catching

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[16] Carter 2015: 292-299; Freedman 2013: 172-173; Skupniewicz 2019.

[17] von Gall 2008.

an opponent from behind in the very course of fighting. Allowing a dose of anachronistic comparison, the descriptions of mounted duels from Šāhnāme describe the heroes performing the retreats, in which they fight back, and renew the attacks. The ability to fight backwards was not limited to the archery as is attested by Šāhnāme and the examples of the Sasanian silver with the words being used in the direction opposite to the gallop of the horse.[18] On the other hand the Sasanian wall painting from Dura Europos clearly depicts the Persian riders chasing their foes and killing them with the lances, however their horses, except for one unclear example, are not falling, not to mention tumbling.[19] The wall painting from Dura Europos seem to refer to the actual tradition of the riders chasing the enemy, the motif known in Achaemenid art but plentiful in Persian mediaeval and early modern art. The painting represents the dose of realism which could be expected from art made by or by order of local military personnel.

The enemy falling with his horse tumbling convention seems to derive from the Parthian and Hellenistic model depicting a rider attacking an opponent on the dead or dying horse.[20] The slain mount, most often with visible arrows protruding from their bodies, appears in three contexts: (1) as a dead horse being ridden by a defeated figure, most often shown in a position with the knee bent and the other leg straightened, it seems that it was from this model that the ways of showing horse fighting in Sasanian reliefs evolved and most probably this model was applied to the eroded Gotarzes relief,[21] similarly, a partially preserved wall painting from Stara Nisa shows a warrior with an arrow in his eye,[22] riding a wounded horse, although the incompletely preserved monument does not allow us to claim with certainty that one of the aforementioned compositional formulas was used in it, but we can presume that if the "props" were used in accordance with the mentioned premises, the composition should represent one of the models. The vividness of the motif is confirmed by the depiction from the Orlat plaque,[23] but also the depiction from the silver cup from Kosika alludes in an indirect

way to the discussed pattern.[24] It is true that the wounded horse is galloping, dragging the inert body of the defeated warrior, but the arrow stuck in it is carefully marked. (2) The steed lying between the combatants, with the defeated one riding another mount, and (3) the defeated figure depicted standing, actively opposing the main character.

The ultimate origin of the *The enemy falling with his horse tumbling* seems to be the Neo-Assyrian iconography, where in the fragments of the reliefs of Ashurbanipal and Tiglah Pilaser, in British Museum, the scenes of the defeated riders, shown on falling or fallen horses or camels. persecuted by the victorious Assyrian armoured lancers or mounted archers can be found.[25] The main structural difference between the Neo-Assyrian and early Sasanian models is functioning of the formula which, in Assyrian art is just a part of detail and figure packed composition of clearly narrative character, while the Sasanian aesthetics reveals strong tendency towards iconic approach. Other important difference is the position of the lance of the victorious rider who, on the Neo-Assyrian depictions thrust downwards while the preferred wielding method among the Sasanians was two-handed horizontal grip. The horses and camels on the relief of Ashurbanipal and Tiglah Pilaser are shown falling or fallen rather than tumbling. Obviously the details of equipment, horse breed and stylisations vary significantly, but they do not affect the structural perception.

Among the examples of heroic victory over a falling rider, an intersecting analogy is provided by the series of the 4th century Roman coins of so-called "falling horseman" type, where the rider is chased by the over-sized figure of a soldier in the Roman garb, identified as the Emperor.[26] The defeated rider extends his arm towards the figure persecuting him in well-known gesture of mercy-seeking which originates in Neo-Assyrian iconography, remains well-attested in Achaemenid sigillography and survives into the Hellenistic period.[27] In the Imperial Roman art the arm extended back could be interpreted as a gesture of victory or marking a particular achievement, so its reappearance should be linked with revival of some Hellenistic traits in Late Antiquity. It must be noted, that in the Sasanian art such gesture of surrender does not appear in the combat context, so the figure of the "falling horseman"

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[18] Skupniewicz 2020.

[19] James 2004: 42; Goldman, Little 1980: 293.

[20] Skupniewicz 2015b; Skupniewicz 2018; Skupniewicz, Lichota 2017.

[21] von Gall 1990: 11-12; Skupniewicz 2021b.

[22] Pilipko 2001; Pilipko 2006.

[23] Abdullaev 1995a; Abdullaev 1995b; Ilyasov, Rusanov 1997-1998; Nikonorov, Hudyakov 1999; Pugachenkova 1987; Skupniewicz 2022b.

[24] von Gall 1997; von Gall 1998.

[25] Reade 2018.

[26] Malone 2009.

[27] Skupniewicz 2025b.

Fig. 3. Naqš-e Rōstam NRm3 relief. Photo by dynamosquito.
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in the Roman numismatics was not borrowed from the Sasanian neighbour and could not be a modified adoption of the discussed formula. The gesture of mercy-seeking by extending an arm towards chasing enemy requires presentation of the fleeing victim however, in its traditional forms, the formula does not allow the mercy to be granted, while the Sasanian royal propaganda preferred to show the king accepting the surrender of the humbled opponents. At the same time, it should be pointed out that the falling horses of the defeated enemies appear on the decorations of the Roman sarcophagi.

The defeated on the rearing horse. The formula is represented by the upper scene from the relief NRm7 (Fig. 2) and NRm3 (Fig. 3). The proponent, as in all cases is shown riding on the steed in the flying gallop with lance hel two handed on the hips level across the horse's neck. The opponent is hit and his horse stands on two hind legs with front legs stretched ahead in the air. The position of the steed reminds rearing, however it is surely resulting from the power of the lance hit inflicted by the victor. This is clearly illustrated by the fact that the defeated horse has the hind legs placed horizontally on the ground while in rearing or gallop they would be directed more upwards. Clearly the horse is shown seated on the hind legs under the impact of the lance thrust. The power of the thrust which knocked a horse of the defeated down did not affect the victor, signifying his strength. The head of the defeated is bent backwards, lifting the chinn up.

From the perspective of the visual mass energies directions, the rapid movement of the victor is crushing against immovable mass of the defeated rider who absorbs the impact and constitutes the limit of the scene. As much in *The enemy falling with his horse tumbling* formula the tumbling horseman absorbed the energy and directed the impact down and upwards, dispersing it, in *The defeated on the rearing horse* formula the defeated opposes the dynamism of the victor and gets crushed by it. Because of the similar praiseworthy factor, i.e. definite power of the lance thrust, the model may remind later mediaeval European illustrations, which proves the variety of tactics employed by the Sasanian cavalry.

The lances of the defeated are lifted obliquely upwards thus not threatening the main personage, pointing over him. In case of NRm3, the lance is broken (Fig. 3). The broken or abandoned spear of the victim is a relatively common motif, the origins of which can be traced as far back as Mesopotamian art – Naramsin's defeated enemies hold broken spears, indicating their utter helplessness against the victorious king. Broken spars appear on the Alexander Mosaic, a Bithynian stele with the scene of the battle against the Galatians, but they remain in the Pantikappean frescoes, and appear on the Orlat plaque.[28]

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[28] Skupniewicz 2018.

The formula *The defeated on the rearing horse* which emphasises the power of the thrust which immobilises the defeated opponent, seems to derive from the depictions of the riders in combat with the foot warriors, known from Assyrian, Achaemenid and Parthian examples.

Confrontation of the riders. The formula includes the riders in the flying gallop attacking towards the center with their lances. As the Sasanian royal art did not allow depictions of the unpunished confrontation with the king, the defeated rider is marked clearly by the body position and obliquely raised lance which no longer poses any threat to the victor. This formula is illustrated by the only one scene on the lower part of the royal relief NRm7 (Fig. 2). It is clear that the combat scene on the stucco fragment from Bandiyan must have represented a variation of the model, but as the upper part of the relief is destroyed, it is impossible to determine anything more than the position of the horses confronted in gallop.[29] The scene of the two riders charging against each other in "flying gallop" can be found on one of the bullae from Armenian National Museum in Erevan, however the depiction includes an archer on the left side, while the armament of the enemy cannot be determined. The battle scene in the Rustam cycle from Panjikent, clearly adopts the formula seen in Naqsh-e Rostam, where the riders are depicted as galloping toward each other, but one is clearly shown as hit, his body is bent back and lance turned upwards, thus not threatening the victorious king.[30] The lance is visible only fragmentary but by analogy to other reliefs, it is likely that it was originally shown as broken.

Sogdian painting applies the formula to a battle scene not only to a duel but also to multiple warriors behind the main personages. It must be pointed out that the depiction of symmetrically placed warriors, without clear indication of the winning and defeated sides, was foreign to Sasanian aesthetics. It cannot be found in Parthian art either. The related example can be found on Himyarite bronze part of the horse harness from Yemen, however because of difference in gallop stylisation, the composition there seems more triangular. The wall painting from the synagogue from Dura Europos with the scene of the battle of Ebenezer clearly shows two confronting riders in gallop but they are wielding short shafted weapons and the motif is of Greek origin. Symmetry in designing of the combat scenes seems foreign to the idea of the heroic encounters in Iranian imagery as it fails to determine clearly the winner. The dramatic tension of the warriors approaching from two sides seems to contradict the message of the glorious victory of the heroic monarch. That is why the symmetry of the scenes is usually compromised by pointing the victor by the other means.

The victorious combat formulae applied in the scenes of the crowned hero in combat with the beasts, frequently encountered on the decoration of the Sasanian silverware, do not represent the same layout as the combat scenes on the rock reliefs, even when the lances are used. There are, naturally, the compositional analogies, however, generally, the depictions of the lance employment in toreutics show them thrusted diagonally instead in horizontal two-handed grip. The only possible exception would be the exceptional plate from the Wyveryn Collection with the bear hunt, which requires further study from the image-building perspective.[31]

The battle scenes on the Arch of Galerius and the Roman versions of "heroic encounters"

There are three battle scenes on the Arch of Galerius and they do not seem to represent the coherent combat or war narrative. Rather, they seem to constitute separate and visually independent depictions of victory (victories?). It is difficult to grade the level of significance between the themes they, seemingly, belong to somehow different but related iconographic designs and orders of reading. It is impossible to accept the simple division between narrative (annalistic) and ceremonial (panegyrical) as was defined by Schönebeck and sustained by Laubscher which was later re-examined by Rothman. None of the scenes depicting battles contains any sort of realism, identifiable as "annalistic" which could be compared to the annalistic-"realistic" decorations of the column of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius or parts of arch of Constantine. All three battle scenes refer to iconographic traditions of heroic, triumphal combat with the strong emphasis of the figure of central rider whose prowess seems the main subject of the scene. Researching narrative organisation and the designed sequence of reading of the panels on the Arch of Galerius is the task which seems

[29] Rahbar 2008: 21-22, 39, fig 27.
[30] Azarpay 1982 ; Ciafaloni, Della Rocca de Candal 2011, 111, 114-120.
[31] Skupniewicz 2025.

Fig. 4. Arch of Galerius, panel B.III.24.
Photo by Ortolf Harl (May 2014) © Ubi Erat Lupa

impossible due to fragmentary state of survival of the structure. Therefore, true to he impossible to determine firmly relation between the panels , the scenes will be treated as separate iconographic entities.

When entering approaching the arch from the city, the first relief with the battle depiction on the panel below the uppermost one, on the left pillar is located (B.III.24). It is entitled/attributed as "Allegorische Schlachtenbild" by Laubscher and Virtus Augusti and by Pond Rothman. The relief is heavy weathered as it was placed on the external wall of the arch from the moment of construction (Fig.4).

On the internal walls of the piers, facing the space roofed by the arch, one finds two battle scenes in better state of preservation. On the right wall (if approaching from the city of Thessaloniki), in the row corresponding the "Allegorische Schlachtenbild"/ Virtus Augusti one finds the panel ascribed as "Triumphales Siegesbild" by Laubscher and "combat between Galerius and Narses" by Pond Rothman (B.II.20) (Fig. 5). Because of the iconographic features discussed below, the scene seems to contain the greatest semantic significance among the battle depictions and was likely to be the main battle scene in the complex.

On the opposite inner wall of the arch, in the uppermost register, a panel with a "Schlacht zwischen Römer und Persern" per Laubscher, or "The Last Battle" as labelled by Schönebeck and Pond Rothman, (A.II.5) (Fig. 6) is located. The panel seems to correspond with the top panel on the external facade directed towards Adrianopole which is identified as "Ausfall der Römer aus

diner belagerten Stadt" by Laubscher and "Roman Cavalry Charge" by Pond Rothman (A.I.1) (Fig. 7). It depicts a group of riders galloping the same direction. Cavalcade is heading one direction with no opponents in its way. This way a continuity might have been suggested with the scene of the "Roman Cavalry Charge"/"Ausfall der Römer aus diner belagerten Stadt" (A.I.1) (Fig. 7) being a prelude to "Schlacht zwischen Römer und Persern"/"The Last Battle" (A.II.5) (Fig. 6) and ending with A.III.9 "Unterwerfung von Gefangenen von dem Keiser"/Clementia Augusti. Pond Rothman has noted existence of the relations between the pairs of the scenes on the different sides of a pier however noted that "a viewer could not study two pier faces together" which assumes stationary designed point of observation which does not seem obvious or necessary for the structure placed on crossroad.[32] It is likely that the message was to be legible for the viewers passing through and by the arch. Repetitions might not rise from coherent narrative presented in a fixed order, to be observed within a particular program but from the nature of the structure accessible from four directions and creating communicative patterns. This does not mean that they were placed randomly, rather in thematic groups or chains, however the exact chronological sequence which was proposed by Kinch should be excluded. Overall relation between the panels is impossible to determine without knowing decoration of the missing piers. Also, in the light of later, early Christian and Sasanian semantic

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[32] Pond Rothman 1977, 452.

Fig. 5. Arch of Galerius, panel B.II.20.
Photo by Ortolf Harl (May 2014) © Ubi Erat Lupa.

architectural orders, it is justified to assume that the most important depictions, whether painted or in colour relief, were placed inside the dome, with less important depictions on the tambour supporting the dome. This makes the survived reliefs of tertiary importance in the semantic sequence and this is only if the lost piers were not treated as "main entrance" or an actual portal, and thus dominating, in content, the survived ones. It should be emphasised here that the so-called arch is very different construction from the Roman triumphal arches and represents a kind of transition form of a discontinued architectural genre, marking entry into aesthetics of the Late Antiquity. For sake of brevity, the name "arch" will be used below. The visual program in its entity cannot be responsibly attempted to reconstruct even the scale of damage. The semantic structure must have complied the designs of Late Antiquity and the decoration of Arch of Galerius was, most likely an important stage in their development, adopted by Christian aesthetics, well attested in early Byzantine, Armenian art but which traces survived in Orthodox Church to this day. Such "post-text" cannot be ignored, as the art works are always certain markers of their times and in case of incompletely survived pieces, the following, later steps in the sequence may provide valuable information or clues. When discussing historical art, its source is often as important as the forms it developed after. The comparison with the later forms, does not produce absolute reliability, however it is almost certain that the panels with which we are left did not constitute the grand message of the building but were parts of decoration of lesser importance. Thus, the repetitive scenes

within the surviving decoration, do not necessarily refer to different events, they might belong to different narrative flows of the lowest, external, semantic tier of decoration.

In light of obscure order of presentation, employment of the scenes on the panels of the arch for reconstruction of the course of historical events[33] does not seem well justified.

It is possible that there is a semantic connection between the panels in rows, as well as in columns. Such possibility was already pointed by Pond Rothman as was stated above.[34] The correspondence should be extended to the rows between the piers. This way, if approaching from Thessaloniki, an observer would notice the "Allegorische Schlachtenbild"/Virtus Augusti (B.III.24) (Fig. 4) and passing through the arch, the scene would transfer into "Triumphales Siegesbild"/"combat between Galerius and Narses" (B.II.20) and the theme would conclude with B.I.16: "Die persische Friedens – gesandtschaft vor Galerius"/"Galerius" Reception of a Persian Delegation". But had the observer not decided to go through the arch, the scene corresponding B.III.24 (Fig.4) – "Allegorische Schlachtenbild"/Virtus Augusti, would be A.III.10 – "Unterwerfung von Gefangen von dem Keiser"/ Clementia Augusti. So, one battle scene precedes the other, as if underlining the consequent line of victories which lead to establishment of the glorious peace or Emperor's clementia.

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[33] Suski 2016: 162-166.
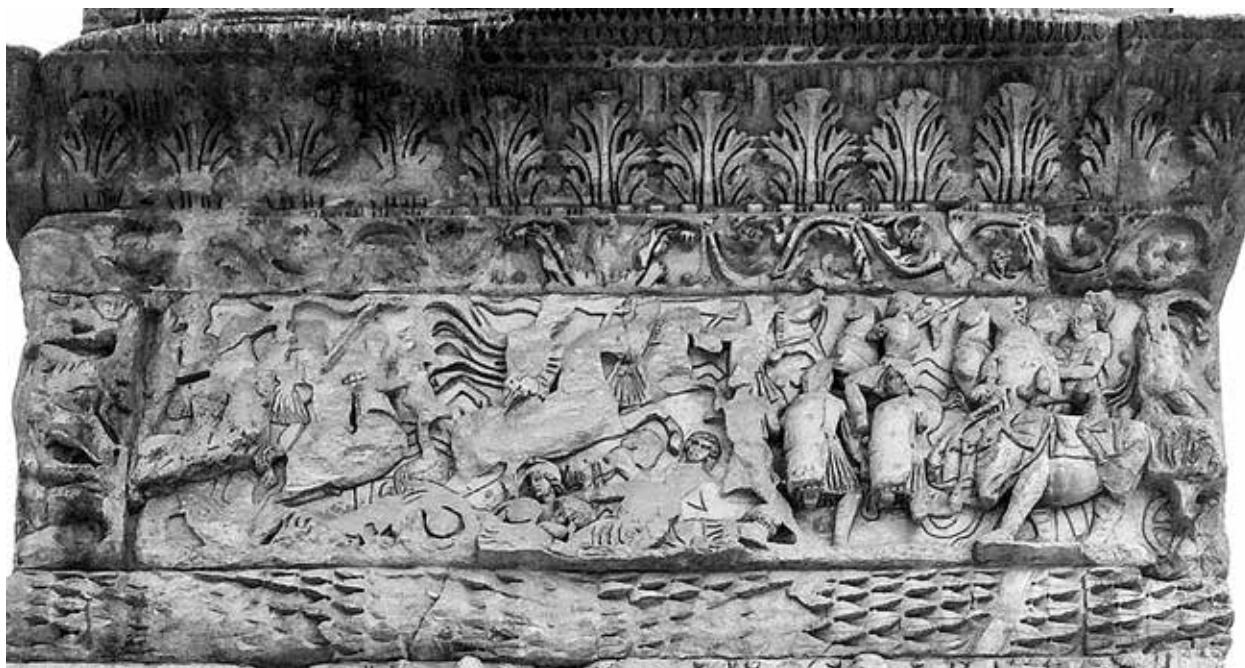[34] Pond Rothman 1977, 451-452; Suski 2016: 162=163.

Fig. 6. Arch of Galerius, panel A.II.5.
Photo by Ortolf Harl (May 2014) © Ubi Erat Lupa.

It is important to note that passing through the arch, two combat scenes are visible on the opposite walls (B.II.20 and A.II.5) however not in the same registers which allows avoiding mirroring them. B.II.20 seems the dominant among the surviving battle scenes, as will be elaborated below, and B.III.24 act as a prelude, or introduction to it, for a viewer entering the space under the dome from Thessaloniki, while A.II.5 is placed on the opposite wall however on different register avoiding the visual clash and subsequent thematic competition of the scenes. A.II.5 "comments" B.III.24 but is not allowed to challenge it importance.

As it was stated above, this is not the place to asses the overall structure of visual orders of the arch of Galerius, however the above observation might point that instead of three separate battle scenes, we should talk rather about two paired panels depicting warfare related scenes and capitulated with a scene of glorious result of victorious warfare. It seems plausible that the program of the decorations was made legible in vertical sequences, however it is most likely that the arch had more than one way of reading and must have been legible for viewers passing it by as well as crossing it. Actual narrative program is impossible to reconstruct without decoration of the not preserved piers, as current knowledge of the relations between the panels is fragmentary. It is possible that the missing parts were in fact actual facade covered by even more monumental decoration, but equally possible would be that they constituted the

back, undecorated, part. All battle scenes follow conventional formulae however each panel is clearly using different compositional concepts. Thus, it it prudent to treat each panel separately. They will be briefly analysed in sequence that would appear to the viewer approaching from Thessaloniki, thus without presumption of their semantic status, i.e. B.III.24 first, placed on the facade facing the city, followed by B.II.20, immediately on the right wall of the pier and A.II.5 as the last one, opposing B.II.20 and placed in higher register. Such, arbitral, order of presentation and consideration might, in fact, be a opposite than the order of semantic values, as it starts from the most external decoration, which might even be a part of the "back" wall of the structure but in dynamic perception, it would be the point to lead to the next battle scene of much greater importance. Also, such order would follow modern viewing order which should not be totally rejected as it definitely influences the viewers and remains not hypothetical (hypothetically original) but actual.

B.III.24. (Fig. 4) "Allegorische Schlachtenbild" by Laubscher and Virtus Augusti and by Pond Rothman. The panel is heavily weathered which does allow general composition but makes it impossible to recognise any details the gestures or facial expressions of the figures and sometimes their exact positions. It is impossible to determine how was the scene delimited, the edges of the panel are heavily weathered leaving barely marks of decoration. It should be assumed that the battle occupied

Fig. 7 Arch of Galerius, panel A.I.1 © CC-BY-SA 4.0.
Foto by Herbert Frank (May 2019)

entire panel, the presence of the over-sized figures flanking or framing the actual scene can entirely excluded, even if such a layout was employed on the referring internal panel B.II.20 (Fig. 5). The surface on the left edge suggests presence of two smaller figures and on the right destruction is too great to assess the actual depictions there however it had to be balanced with the left part, so it is logical that it container further battle details.

In the centre a cuirassed person of (in all likelihood) the emperor on a galloping/rearing horse is placed. Behind the rider part of his pandulamentum floating in the air can be seen, however the original position of the head is unclear. The stone is heavily weathered and a part protruding to the left might suggest either personage's head turned slightly backwards or trace of a lance shaft directed diagonally down. It should be marked that the head bent back and downwards would require a lance to be directed vertically down[35] or even behind, against an unknown target, which might be impossible to identify due to current state of preservation. Directly under the emperor's horse there is an object which could be interpreted as unstrung bow in a cover, which would be a part of Persian panoply, however that device is not otherwise

attested in Parthian or Sasanian art. The spirally twisted end of the bow arm would be typical for "Scythian" type of bow, for some two centuries abandoned among Iranian cavalry[36]. This might result from antiquarian decorum of Late Antiquity which required employment of traditionally recognisable emblems rather than actual items, or point at, at least partial but direct inspiration, of the sculptors of the discussed panel, with an older art work adopted to the needs of the current work. Naturally, the shape might refer to some other object legible only as a whole.

At the same time it should be pointed that below the front part of the emperor's mount, an animal, which appears a fallen horse with larger part of the head broken off, is shown. The former rider of the fallen animal is located further to the right, in a place where a hypothetical diagonally directed lance of the emperor would point. The downward diagonal attack of a rider against a fallen footman or dismounted rider is the most commonly recognisable way of depicting triumphant riders in ancient art. Such visual formula or pictorial model appeared already in Neo-Assyrian iconography where it was only an element of the crowded battle scenes but in Achaemenid and Classical Greek and Hellenistic iconographies the model gained quality of centrality and heroism, often being applied without battle context or excuse, leaving the scene a true icon of violence or a "heroic encounter"

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[35] Referring iconography: Glanum-Paoletti 2010: 318-319, fig. 12-13; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas sarcophagus 1999.107; Sidamara sarcophagus in Istambul; the visual type seems to be associated with the scenes of the riders hitting the targets behind the with the swords as is in the case of bronze Alexander statue and Etruscan grave stelae.

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[36] Skupniewicz 2021a; Skupniewicz 2022.

as was defined by Garrison.[37] The formula was adopted in the hunting scenes however it should be emphasised here that from the perspective of image-building, the fact whether protagonist's opponent is a human enemy or ferocious, life-threatening beast is of not vague relevance. Fighting foes and beats remains equally heroic and was often used interchangeably or as a kind of mutually fulfilling feats.[38]

In the Roman battle iconography, which was believed by Tonio Hölscher[39] to be dominated by the actual battle depictions with almost no heroic duels, apparently in contrast to Greek tradition, the scenes of heroic triumph are, in fact, not that uncommon. On one hand there is entire, wide group of cavalry tombstones depictions covering period from 1st to 4th centuries,[40] which employ the discussed formula, but, what seems even more important, Roman large battle compositions, often of Imperial propagandistic nature, also explore the heroic models. Some, like the war narratives on imperial columns or Glanum arch,[41] in the way that reminds original functional idea from the Assyrian reliefs, where the heroic models are lost in the narrative crowd, but also, quite commonly, clearly pointing the centrality of the victorious figure, emphasising his personal heroism. Such approach to the heroic formulae could be observed already earlier in Achaemenid Anatolian art, with excellent examples of Payava[42] and Tatarli[43] tomb decorations, as well as in Greek iconography like Nereid Monument and Limyra epitaph.[44] It was also common to locate the main heroic scene between the scenes of lesser importance, as exampled by the decorations of the so-called Sarcophagus of Alexander,[45] Bithynian stelae and Etruscan urns.[46] Although, clearly, Hölscher's observation remains absolutely valid when applied to the monumental narratives, but the clear distinction between alleged Greek individual heroism and Roman tightly packed arrays, cannot be sustained. It seems that individualistic approach was mainly cultivated in art which was not state-sponsored, however Trajanic panels on the Arch of Constantine prove that there were attempts to employ traditional iconography of individual heroism to the battle scenes, where the non-central combatants flanked the victorious protagonist. Even among the crowded melees shown on the Roman sarcophagi, sometimes (Villa Giustiniani, Palermo, Portonaccio, Little Ludovisi) the protagonist can be distinguished by his central place in composition and more space he occupies. Probably the biggest difference in the type of central victorious figure in the compositions of the Greek or Anatolian art and the Roman art is the asymmetry of the latter. While both models are divided into halves, in the older Greek-Anatolian formulae the movement of the sides was directed to the centre of the scene, where the decisive duel was taking place. This created the energies directed towards the axis of the scene. The Roman equivalents were apparently less bothered by compositional finesse and balance which came at the cost of not fully defined victory, as the opponents were still moving towards the winning army. As the result, the Roman scenes usually show the enemy desperately fleeing of being killed. In case of Palermo, Portonaccio sarcophagi and Trajanic frieze panels used as spolia on the Arch of Constantine, the awkwardness of single direction of the movement within the field, was balanced by the group of the Romans who surrounded the enemy, and this way the inside movement is applied from the right side, re-applying some symmetry. Another way to assure the glory of the victory over substantial enemy, while avoiding throwing the composition out of balance, was dividing the scene in horizontal layers where the upper was occupied by the victors and the lower by the defeated. All-in-all, crowded Roman battle scenes lack clearly defined compositional consideration and make far more chaotic impression, however only in few examples they present clear independence from the earlier sources.

[37]   Cohen 1997: 24-50; Thracian Gold from Bulgaria, 2013: 180-201; Gawlikowski, 2005: 1293-1304; Harper, 2006. Skupniewicz, 2015a; Skupniewicz 2015b; Ma, 2008: 243-25; Secinç, Korpe, Tombul, Rose, Strahan, Kieserwette, Wallrodt, 2001: 383-420; Stronach, 1998: 231-248; Boardman, 2006: 115-119; Kubala 2006: 55-57; Kubczak 1978; Kubczak 1995: 16, 19, 25; Scythian Art. 1986, fig. 128-129; Aruz, Farkas, Alekseev, Korolkova 2000, s. 219-223; Skupniewicz, Lichota 2017; Garrison 2010.

[38]   Cohen 2010: 119-145.

[39]   Hölscher 2003.

[40]   Schleiermacher 1984; Coulston 2007.

[41]   Paoletti 2012.

[42]   Pirson 2014, s.230, tabl. 34; Ma 2008, s. 244, fig. 3; Nefedkin 2006, s. 8, fig. 3.

[43]   Sumerer 2007, s. 3-30; Sumerer 2007, s. 129-156.

[44]   Pirson 2014, s. 229-230, 235.

[45]   Havelock 1972, s. 191-192, fig. 150-152; Boardman 1999, s. 237-240, fig. 237; Palagia 2015, s. 8-9; Pirson 2014, s. 248-349, tabl. 40-41.

[46]   Pirson, 2014, s. 236, tabl. 25; 225-274.

The model with the oblique downwards lance thrust remained dominant in the iconography of the warrior saints of the Christian art and appears in single or two-handed variety in Sasanian toreutics.[47]

The fallen horse of the enemy being killed by the scene protagonist is one of the traditional elements of the mounted victory scenes. The slain mount, most often with visible projectiles protruding from their bodies, appears often as being ridden by a defeated figure, most often shown in a position with the knee bent and the other leg straight, as can be seen on the Alexander Mosaic and Alexander sarcophagus, however earlier, Assyrian versions of the model did not have the position of the victim canonically developed. It seems that it was from this model that the ways of showing horse fighting in Sasanian reliefs developed and, most probably, this model was applied to the eroded relief of Gotarzes, similarly a partially preserved wall painting from Stara Nisa shows a warrior with an arrow in his eye. Admittedly, the latter monument is incompletely preserved and does not allow stating, with certainty, that one of the above-mentioned compositional formulas was used. The vividness of the motif is confirmed by the depiction from the Orlat plaque, but also the representation from the silver cup from Kosika alludes to the discussed model in an indirect way. It is true that the wounded horse is galloping, dragging the inert body of the defeated warrior, but the arrow stuck in it is carefully marked. It can be presumed that the scene from the Kosika monument was influenced by both models of the triumph of the heroic rider and the pursuit of the fleeing enemy. The falling or fallen horses with heads directed down and cruppers up, are present in the cavalry battle scenes shown on the reliefs of Glanum arch or Amendola sarcophagus. The dead horses covering the grounds of other sarcophagi cannot be clearly connected with the opponent being killed by the protagonist or the scenes do not show the main personage in the act of actual killing. In Glanum relief, the dead horse accompanies the scene of a thick melee without the glorious victor defined.[48]

The fallen or falling horse with the rider speared by the giant Roman personage appears on 4th century coins,[49] and although, the scene does not include the mounted victor the horse's head turned down and the enemy helplessly sitting on the dying or dead animal is referring to older, Hellenistic, patterns which in turn derive indirectly from the Assyrian reliefs. What deserves attention is the fact that the motif of the opponent on the dead or dying horse with the head turned down was shared by the Roman and Sasanian iconographies.

Not much can be said about the details of the depiction. One of the warriors behind the main personage is shown wearing the scale armour which marks Galerius' guard or elite troops on other panels of the arch. Lorica squamata was a standard mode of armament of the Roman soldiers and using it as an argument for alleged Sarmatian origin of Galerius' troops seems far fetched. The emperor himself wears a plain corselet with rounded or leaf shaped protrusions at the bottom, with a pteryges falling from below. The same type of armament can be found on the sculpture of the "Tetrarchs" from Venice. Both Wójcikowski and Skupniewicz proposed that the cuirass of such type might have special meaning related with power.[50]

The relief B.III.24 is well settled within the Roman visual traditions which stem from older Hellenistic sources in terms of composition and the preserved details are well established in the reality of the time. There is nothing specifically allegorical in its composition or elements when compared with the remaining battle scenes on the arch, however it clearly refers to schematic visual formulae widely employed in the Roman art but originating from Hellenistic inspirations but rooted in the art of Assyria. Obviously, the popularity of the formula of the heroic rider thrusting his lance down against fallen opponent might result from battlefield realism, however the direct clashes of cavalry against infantry were seldom preferred tactics. Nevertheless, such scheme allowed drawing greater contrast in status between the victor and defeated. The Roman cavalry tombstones commonly use that effect,[51] possibly adding the suggestion of sexual violence[52] which must derive from Etruscan imagery.[53] It must be added that that possibly sexual positions of the defeated enemies were western invention and cannot be found on Hellenistic or Iranian examples.

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[47] Skupniewicz 2009.

[48] Paoletti 2012.

[49] Malone 2009 (2010).

[50] Skupniewicz 2006; Skupniewicz 2015; Wójcikowski 2015: 117.

[51] Schleiermacher 1984.

[52] Pirson 2006; Coulston 2009; the latter author provides the clues to perceive the positions of the defeated gladiators in perspective of sexual violence but exactly that same postures of the defeated barbarians are commonly found on cavalry tombstones.

[53] Pirson 2014.

B.II.20 "Triumphales Siegesbield" by Laubscher and "combat between Galerius and Narses" by Pond Rothman consists of the central battle scene flanked by the to over-sized warrior figures on both sides with minor depictions fitted to the narrow straps behind them. This makes the composition a form of triptych with the main, central picture and the wings of secondary visual importance, whose role is rather emphasising the importance of the central scene than providing own narrative. The giant figures are shown stepping outside the format in an almost symmetrical way, however the one on the right carries a large oval shield and probably a rope with which the prisoners are bound, while the one on the left has his right hand raised and resting on the spear shaft while the left is most likely holding the reins of a rearing horse depicted at the far right. The right giant tramples a kneeling and prostrating enemy.

The idea of flanking battle scene with standing personages excluded visually from the course of action is relatively well attested stylistic formula recorded in the battle scenes on the Roman sarcophagi, like Portonaccio, Palermo, Pisa Campo Santo, Borghese, Villa Giustiniani or Vatican Amazonomachy. It should be noted that in earlier group the flanking figures were of the same scale as the combatants and their scene-framing function was naked by the tropai under which they stood,[54] but already in case of Borghese sarcophagus, despite the tropai the figures are already scaled up while in Villa Giustiniani sarcophagus the size is marking the side figures as non-participants of the combat but separate side scenes allegorically stating the fate of the defeated. Interestingly, one of the flanking figures on the Vatican Amazonomachia sarcophagus is also shown holding a riderless horse by the reins. Similar giant heroic figure stands curbing a horse in the right part of the sarcophagus formerly in Villa Giustiniani, however this helmeted figure does not have a counterpart at the other side of the composition. The function of the visual frames are, in this case, taken over by the allegoric female figures standing over bound barbarians. In both cases (Vatican Amazonomachia sarcophagus and former Villa Giustiniani) the horse is placed towards the center of the scene while in B.II.20 panel it is outside. This might indicate that the common motif was adopted to the stiffer composition and its space limits.

Obviously, there is a significant thematic shift from barbarian captures standing passively and helplessly at the bottom of a tropaion and over-sized warriors in moments of triumph, however seeing the composition as a fixed structure, both subjects play the same function of allegoric "comments" to the central scene and its visual limitations. The position of the figure trampled by the gigantic personage on the right associates with the cavalry epitaphs, gladiatorial iconography[55] clearly referring to the fixed formulae of violent triumph.

The scene in the center consists of the dynamic and visually dominant right part where the clash of two riders is depicted and the right part where warriors on foot are represented behind the left of the clashed riders. The left rider is thus the center of the scene and marks the vertical axis of entire panel. An eagle with a wreath in its claws is placed directly above the head of the rider, unmistakably identifying him as an emperor.

The horses of both riders are shown rearing or in high gallop in very close distance, with their heads almost touching, divided only by a head of a personage behind. The bodies of the horses mark clear triangular layout. Inside the triangle defined by the horses trunks there is a warrior kneeling on his left knee, wearing a tunic with a horizontal central strap, with a round shield behind, attempting to unsheathe the sword. It is justified to reconstruct his right leg stretched out the left, in quite typical manner of marking the defeated employed in Hellenistic and Roman art.[56] His left hand is missing. The main, central rider sits vertically in the saddle while his opponent is shown in oddly straight stretched position, obliquely to the right side. This corresponds with the warrior below, visually contrasting the right side waving down with the firm, vertical emperor. The emperor wears a pteryges and a cuirass of the same type as on the panel B.III.24. His cloak is clasped over right shoulder. His left arm is hidden behind the horse's neck. The details of the face and the right arm did not survive. Although the right arm of the emperor has not survived there are remnants of the shaft of his lance running across his pteryges and horse's breast. This means that the lance was held almost horizontally, slightly upwards, single-handed, with a grip behind the torso of the rider. The rider on the right was hit below his left shoulder and he is holding the shaft with his right, bent arm in an attempt of weakening the blow. He is wearing narrow trousers under pteryges and sits in what

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[54] On tropai see: Hölscher 2006.

[55] Schleiermacher 1984; Coulston 2007; Coulston 2009; Pirson 2006.
[56] Skupniewicz 2018.

appears horned saddle placed on top of the feline skin functioning as the saddle blanket. He wears a cuirass with the shoulder defences.

The composition of the combat scene refers clearly to the Hellenistic patterns and their descendants in Roman art where the victorious rider is accompanied by an attendant or the attendants.[57] In case of the Roman cavalry tombstones these may represent light infantry runner or call protecting rider from enemy infantry attacks and increasing his tactical flexibility. The tradition which is also earlier attested in Greece in form of the hamippoi.[58] Visually, however, such attendants played seemingly distinct function of presenting the rider in contrast of an inferior personage thus placing him between a supporter of lower rank and a defeated enemy. This way, the superiority of the protagonist was clearly highlighted. The presence of the attendants in the scenes of the triumphal victory of a heroic rider can be observed in Greek-Scythian iconography[59] but it also survived in Iranian art and is clearly attested by the relief in Tang-e Sarvāk as well as the battle reliefs in Naqsh-e Rostam.[60] The tradition was transferred as far as Himyarite Yemen[61] however it is impossible to determine, with certainty, the route by which the model of an armoured cavalryman in heroic combat supported by the personage of the lower status, reached such remote cultural environment. It could be a direct Hellenistic cultural residue, Roman or Iranian. Such transfer however illustrates vitality of the visual formula.

It must be noted that usually the heroic rider does not mark directly the axis of the scene. In most cases he is shown approaching it rapidly usually the vertical axis is placed about the front of the victorious rider's mount, or just before the line of his silhouette, dividing the composition into the winning and loosing parts. The layout depends on the format of the scene and the closer to square or compact it is the less symmetrical it besoms and the deeper the protagonist gets into the loosing part. There are several examples of the symmetrical mounted combat scenes which seem to originate from the Hellenistic or Late Classical Greek tradition, however their lack of visual decisiveness reduced their later popularity.[62] Even less common is the triangular composition of the combat scene, defined by the trunks of the rearing or galloping horses. Such formula can be seem on the Aemilius Paulus monument commemorating his victory at Pydna, however the symmetry of the horses is reduced by the simple fact that one of them is already without the rider, thus visually defining the victor. The examples much closer could be found on the relief on the amazonomachy sarcophagus in London,[63] on the sarcophagus from Sidamaria in Istanbul,[64] or bronze horse harness element from Himyarite Yemen also with the scene of possible amazonomachy.[65] Another analogy already pointed by Laubscher can be found on the relief in Iznik, where the triangular composition of combat is flanked by the riders approaching from both directions. The scene itself includes victorious rider on the left and the falling enemy supported by an attendant on foot. Panel B.II.20 of the Arch of Galerius is a combination of these older designs but plays yet a different role. On one hand it includes the compact symmetrical combat scene int he right part, on the other hand, by the presence of the figure behind the protagonist it refers to the tradition of the scenes with the attendants. The shields of the soldiers behind the emperor additionally separate the picture. So, there are several traditional frames applied in the scene which are subdued to the main layout with the emperor in the centre and the eagle carrying a wreath over his head: symmetrical combat, symmetrical combat horizontally extended, "attendants" who in this case seem rather Persians who failed to encircle the protagonist, their shields and lack of offensive postures do not show them as any kind of threat for the central rider.

Single handed low lance grip, with the shaft below the hip level, became a popular mounted fighting posture in Hellenistic art, likely connected with adoption of the longer cavalry xystoi,[66] however such lance positions already known in late classical iconography. The low grip became popular in the Parthian art to be replaced by the two-handed hold in Sasanian art and its

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[57] Schleriermacher 1984; Gawroński 2018.

[58] Sekunda 2009.

[59] Kubczak 1978; Kubczak 1999; Skupniewicz 2016; Skupniewicz 2018; Skupniewicz, Lichota 2017.

[60] Canepa 2013; von Gall 1990; von Gall 1997; von Gall 1998; Kawami 1987; Kawami 2013; Mielczarek 1993; Nikonorov 2020; Skupniewicz 2016; Skupniewicz 2021b; Skupniewicz 2021c.

[61] Yule, Robin 2005/6; Skupniewicz 2016; Skupniewicz 2021c.

[62] Skupniewicz 2021c.

[63] Koch, Sichterman 1982: 140, fig. 146; Laubscher 1975: 134.

[64] Koch Sichterman 1982: 503, fig. 493.

[65] Antonini 2005; Antonin, Yule, Robin 2004; Antonini de Maigret 2020: 83-85, Skupniewicz 2021c.

[66] Sekunda 2001; Skupniewicz 2016.

derivates.[67] In Italy it was associated with the iconography related with Alexander, but later it was also adopted on the cavalry tombstones,[68] reliefs of Tropaeum Traiani and sarcophagus Giustiniani. In case of the military effigies and Tropaeum Traiani, the hold is most likely reflecting adoption of the new contarii troops however Giustiniani sarcophagus seems to emulate the iconography associated with Alexander the Great.

The variation of the single-handed low grip showed the rider hitting the low target, trampled by the horse, this way, which resulted in pushing the right hand backwards. The model did not gain popularity however was employed in late classical art as well Etruscan and in hight Empire.[69] This hold reminds of modern equine sport of tent pegging popular in India, Pakistan and Near East.

It must be pointed out that low, underarm hold is also depicted with much shorter shafts which might be an artistic convention or the combat reality where the combatants swapped the holds in course of fighting independently of the shaft length.

The striking parallel for the panel is provided by the Naqsh-e Rostam reliefs where the victorious Sasanian king unhorses mounted opponent. The almost symmetrical composition of the scene enhances the impression of close relation between them. In fact it is justified to state that the panel B.II.20 is an early example of shared visual language of Sasanian Iran and the Roman Empire, which allows to spread the idea of Late Antiquity further east and include Iran within it, instead of focusing on the direction of influences.

The eagle with a wreath over emperors head clearly refers to the Roman iconography however on so-called Odaenathus' mosaic in Palmyra, the bird of prey carries the diadem towards the head of the victorious rider.[70] Similarily is employed a putto handing over a diadem to possibly an early Kushan king on the gem published by Gaibov and Košelenko.[71]

The Persian warrior in the triangular space between the horses of the emperor and his mounted opponent, refers in position to the classic and Hellenistic iconography where the defeated were frequently shown with one leg sharply bent and the other stretched out. Such formulaic depiction refers clearly to the Persian noble killed by Alexander on Alexander Mosaic from House of Faun in Pompeii, and can be recognised in numerous works of post-hellenists art. Naturally the mosaic was unavailable at the moment of creation of the panel, however as was clearly evidenced by Cohen and supported by Skupniewicz, the Mosaic is located within the flow of compositional traditions.

The scene on the panel B.II.20 is not less conventional than B.III.24 however it refers different visual formulae. Both panels are deeply immersed in the decorum of combat depiction which were ancient already in the time of erecting of the monument and date to, at least Hellenistic era. These heroic scenes emphasise the figure of the protagonist, whether on an empty or crowded backgrounds, in a manner which seems very different from the historical Roman reliefs known from the columns of Trajan, Marcus Aurelius or the Severan arch.

A.II.1. "Schlacht zwischen Römer und Persern" per Laubscher, or "The Last Battle" as labelled by Schönebeck and Pond Rothman, is the last of the battle reliefs which survived on the Arch of Galerius. The crowded composition of the horizontal rectangle is divided into left, Roman side filled with the Roman cavalrymen in scale armours, led by the over-sized figure of the rider. The head and chest of the latter's personage's horse mark the vertical axle of the composition. The right side belongs to the enemies, their figures are mostly on foot, with the row of three soldiers holding the shields in type of scutum. Before them, diagonally lies the figure defeated by the heroic Roman rider. The Persian rider is depicted above the foot soldiers in combat with the Roman adversary. Behind the Persian soldiers there are elephants ridden by the small figures. The elephants seemingly pulled a chariot with a larger figure in it, whose state of preservation does not allow any sort of identification.

The division of composition is also delineated obliquely, as there is a figure of a smaller Roman rider, in the upper register, to the right of the main personage. Further down the line is marked by the defeated figure under the horse of the over-sized Roman. This way, even though the halves are distinctively partitioned vertically, the dynamic, victorious left side gets into the opposite side with a sharp wedge, while the symmetrical part is at the bottom and covered by the defeated Persian.

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[67] Canepa 2013; von Gall 1990; von Gall 1997; von Gall 1998; Kawami 1987; Kawami 2013; Mielczarek 1993; Nikonorov 2020; Skupniewicz 2009; Skupniewicz 2016; Skupniewicz 2021b; Skupniewicz 2021c; Gaibov, Košelenko 2008; Gaibov, Košelenko 2013; Kubik FAMOUS CLIBANARIUS.

[68] Andreae 2003; Cohen 1997; Cohen 2010; Schleiermacher 1984: 101-102, 120-121, 145-146, 153-159, 170-171, 172-173.

[69] Schleiermacher 1984: 216, 159-160, 155-156; Pirson 2014.

[70] Gawlikowski 2005.

[71] Gaibov, Košelenko 2013.

The left side contains the biggest figure, is dynamic and dominant in upper part. Such designs are attested on the Roman sarcophagi as exampled by Portonaccio, Palermo, Borghese. Again, the Persians are clearly and soundly defeated.

As in cases of B.II.20 and B.III.24, a central triumphal scene can be distinguished, and both the Roman cavalry and the Persians seem to outflank it. It was demonstrated above that such layout existed in Anatolian Achaemenid art and was keenly adopted into Hellenistic visual language. The impression is intentionally blurred by addition of the smaller figures almost within the main scene, however scale does not leave doubts about the priority and the person of the protagonist. Clearly the scene is more closely associated with the "Hellenistic" tradition of the heroic victory of an individual than specifically "Roman" "realistic" battle scenes. Naturally, the attempts to combine both principles have appeared in the Roman art earlier, of which relief from Portonaccio sarcophagus is an excellent example, but Trajanic friezes from Arch of Constantine illustrate the same process. In fact, however, the Hellenistic iconography provides sufficient examples of exactly the same approach, with Alexander Mosaic, Alexander Sarcophagus, being of greatest importance. Thus, Hölscher's observation polarising both trends must be treated contextually and deep integration or internalisation of the earlier models must be not forgotten. In other place Hölscher points out how skilfully Roman artisans were capable of utilisation of the Greek forms to convey articulated message of the patron. It seems that the same would apply to the battle and combat depictions.

The right side of the scene shows the infantry soldiers in front, who must have been understood in visual language already as inferior and only smaller figure of a rider is shown being fought by a Roman over/behind them. The infantry with large scutum type shields do not seem typical for the Persian military, however only several decades later testimony of Ammianus Marcellinus compares Iranian infantry with the gladiators-myrmillones, which indicates employment of the large shields. Large, oval shield of a foot soldier is shown on the stucco relief from the castle of Zahak from the Parthian period, but large shields are also mentioned in late Sasanian context. Another explanation might interpret the soldiers as the Romans or related, and the scene depicted submission of a mutiny. It seems less likely due to traditional Roman reluctance to celebrate triumphs in the civil strives.

The intriguing part of the composition is the chariot pulled by the elephants on the far right. The functioning of the quadric differs from B.III.23, the elephants on B.I.18 or the horse drawn chariot on A.II.7 or B.II.19, where the emperor himself sits in the vehicle. The chariot on B.III.23 is being presented or offered to the figure of the emperor, just like the elephants and other beasts on B.I.18. On A.II.1, the chariot belongs to the side opposing the emperor, seems a core of the futile defiance, marking, however potency of the opponent. If compared with Alexander Mosaic, the elephant drawn chariot in Arch of Galerius would be an equivalent of Darius' chariot, even despite different direction and different compositional scheme. Placing of the elephants behind the infantry line would match surprisingly well the testimonies of the Sasanian battle array by Ammianus Marcellinus. The fact that the animals are shown pulling a chariot with a figure of dominant proportions allows to suspect that it had to be personification of Persia or a figure of Narseh.

All three panels with the battle scenes represent the aspects of the same tradition of depicting central figure of the victorious rider defeating his enemies between the fragments of lesser importance, enhancing the effect of totality of the victory. All panels contain allegorical elements, however saturation of the symbolic elements seems to be the greatest in B.II.20. The opinion of allegedly narrative and allegorical series of panels is lacking substance. They are all allegorical and narrative, as it is exactly the narration which conveys the allegorical meaning. It is possible to see the reflexions of actual Persian battle array in A.II.1, but even if such speculation was true, the panel is not less conventional.

The compositional formulae employed in the panels are mistakenly attributed with the Hellenistic patterns which survived in Roman art. In this way the panels are very different from the historiacal narrations on the column of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, Arch of Severus or Constantine. The latter examples, which Hölscher defined as Roman in opposition to Greek and Hellenistic, indeed constitute very different mode of depicting warfare, even if in some cases they still fit in the fragments fixed heroic formulae, hiding them within the masses of figures. The strong Hellenistic influence allows not only compare the panels from the Arch of Galerius with the art of the period, well known, still available to the viewers in the late third century, but also with contemporary Iranian art. As was stated above, there are elements typical for the Roman decorum, developed independently, but they seem to accompany the central combat scenes without affecting them in any considerable sense. Two

giants flanking the central scene in panel B.II.20 carry message of military subjection of the prisoners and taming the horses, which were clearly legible to the viewer of the Roman art.

The spacial relations between the panels do not, in fact, allow reconstruction of their sequence. Educated guesses made so far ignore the fact that the majority of the construction is destroyed and that it was a unique building without direct parallels. It is, thus impossible, to compare the remnants of the Arch of Galerius with other structures of such type. The dome inside marks already Late Antiquity while the very idea of triumphal arch remains in high empire. It is possible that what we have are the remnants of the back side and their narrative programs were adjusted to communication dynamic around and inside the arch.

It is impossible to assume that the scenes depict any stages of a single battle (dispersal of the enemy cavalry B.III.24, defeating the commander B.II.20 and annihilation of infantry A.II.1), as the scenes are dispersed and it is clear that the relation between them were governed by very different principles. Not to mention that entire Roman victory would be achieved by the cavalry without participation of infantry. This emphasis on mounted troops only might be yet another example of traces of Hellenistic tradition.

The panels should be read as repetitive highlights of heroic victory over Persians, generic in nature whose only purpose was to remind viewer, whether passing by, trespassing or going around about military nature of success. Although the message was repetitive, the scenes are not identical and would attract viewer with their varied approaches to the subject.

Conclusions

The mounted victory has been part of iconographic repertoire of Iranian and Roman art. The common source of both traditions may be found in Hellenistic art, which in turn was most likely inspired by the Achaemenid sources, stemming from the conventions developed in Neo-Assyrian art. The battle scenes on the panels of the Arch of Galerius sit very well in Roman tradition, with renewed influence of the Hellenistic taste. This may be easily explained by the projected audience of the piece, mainly associated with the eastern part of the empire. The similarities between the Sasanian rock reliefs depicting mounted combat and the panels of the Arch of Galerius can be easily explained by the common source, as the

significant differences cannot be over-looked. The Sasanian reliefs cherish their iconic quality, showing the duels in minimalistic context, very clearly focusing on the victory of the protagonist, while the panels of the Arch of Galerius, even though they remain very clear who is the protagonist and how heroic he is, provide the battle context and surround the main victory scene with multi-figural compositions. Thus the battle scenes of the Arch of Galerius clearly follow Roman monumental tradition, while the Sasanian reliefs would, in this sense, be rather related to Roman private cavalrymen tombstones where the battle context was also omitted. Naturally, this cannot be the case and surfacing similarity only shows the shared ancestry of the models of the mounted triumph.

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