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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS: ANCIENT LIVES, NEW STORIES: CURRENT RESEARCH ON THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST[2]

How to Create "Administrative" Iconographies? The Bestiary of the Sasanian Glyptic

Delphine Poinsot

Abstract: This study focuses on the bestiary of Iran in late antiquity, in an administrative context of sealing (seals and bullae) and within an administration characterized by a close relationship with the Zoroastrian Church. Its objective is to understand how man's interrelationship with his environment enters into the production of images of an administrative nature. This study therefore compares the bestiary as represented in the glyptic, what we know about fauna in the Sasanian period and human-animal relations, and what we know about Iran's beliefs in late antiquity, particularly through Zoroastrian texts. This confrontation makes it possible to determine what, in iconography, is or is not related to man's relationship with his natural environment. From there, we try to understand the semantic value attached to this relationship, or whether it is to be sought outside this relationship. It appears that the level of human interaction with animals is inversely proportional to the use of the animal as a bestiary's image: the closer an animal is to humans (domestication, breeding), the less visible it is in the seals. In this context, we see an over-representation of wildlife. However, a low level of interaction does not prevent the creation of images that reflect the observation and knowledge of wildlife and domestic fauna during the Sasanian period. Since the images of the bestiary are used in an administrative context, the animals selected belong mainly to the semantic field of royalty and Zoroastrianism, even if they probably do not have a single interpretation. Sometimes these semantic fields are in contradiction, and we find, in the reality of fauna, elements that adapt one to the other.

[2] **Ancient Lives, New Stories: Current Research on the Ancient Near East** was a conference held at the British Museum in London between 1st and 2nd December 2018, organised by Xosé L. Hermoso-Buxán and Mathilde Touillon-Ricci. This paper is part of the proceedings of that conference and have been edited by the organisers, with the support of *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*.

Introduction

Historical background

The Sassanian dynasty (224-651 CE) originated in the region of Fārs, in southwestern Iran today. According to textual evidence, its founder Ardāšīr I (224-241 CE), was born in the city of Stakhr, in the Fārs (Istakhr; Grenet 2003: 55). Revolting against the Parthian power (247 BCE - 224 CE), he took control of Fārs before overthrowing Artaban V (216-224 CE) during the battle of Hormizdaghan (224 CE). This late antiquate dynasty then established its capital at Ctesiphon, around eighty miles south of Baghdad, and extended the borders of its empire from Armenia to Khorassan, encompassing part of what is now Afghanistan and Pakistan. The civilization that flourished under Sasanian authority was characterized by the practice of the Zoroastrian religion. This multi-millennial religion is also known as Mazdeism, after the name of its main god Ahura-Mazda. He is at the origin of all creations and fights against the pollution inflicted on his creatures by the Evil Spirit, Anγra Maniuu. In the West, Mazdeism is best known for its prophet, Zarathustra, as the one who transformed the religion inherited from his ancestors to the point of becoming the dominant religion in Iran until the arrival of Islam (Malandra 2009 and Molé 1967). The Zoroastrians, a community that is still alive today, are also known for the cult of fire, considered sacred, in places called "temple of fire"[i]. In Sasanian times, each king, following his investiture, founded one of these fire temples (Azarnouche 2018a: 126). In addition, the altar on which the sacred fire was burning was represented, flanked by two Zoroastrian priests, at the obverse of the coins minted by the Sasanian kings, from the reign of Šāpūr Ist (241 – 272 CE), the second of the Sasanian kings (Göbl 1971; 43 and pl.2). These elements testify to the alliance between imperial and clerical institutions that characterized Iran in late antiquity. We are not familiar with the more ordinary practice of Mazdeism, which was probably the main practice in the Sasanian period but coexisted with a variety of religions (Shaked 1994), particularly Christian and Jewish communities (Gignoux 2014; Secunda 2014). More generally, daily life in Sasanian Iran remains obscure. The material testimonies that have reached us seem to be mainly of royal or aristocratic production, but take various forms: rock reliefs, silverware, stucco, coins and seals. These, together with the bullae[ii] (Fig.1a and 1b next page), form the largest corpus of objects at our disposal for Iran in late antiquity and are also the most important repertoire of images left by the Sasanian culture.

These images have been grouped by major well-identified iconographic types, notably through the publication of important museum collections (see Bivar 1969; Gyselen 1994). The animal representation is one of these iconographic types and is the most important in numerical terms. Indeed, Sasanian culture, perhaps more than other cultures of late antiquity, gave extreme importance to the relationship with the animal world, whether in the religious field — animals are often the form that the gods take to manifest themselves to man — the economy — pastoralism being an essential component (Gyselen 1997) — as is still is in the region today (Digard 1993) or in the daily life of the king and the court through the practice of hunting in parks — the famous paradise of the Persian kings (Gignoux 1983, Poinsot 2021, 114). The Sasanian bestiary is thus one of the most relevant vectors for entering the heart of Iran's culture of late antiquity, where imagination and reality meet.

Historiography

It is important to underline the importance of the "Zoroastrian" approach in the analysis of Sasanian iconographies, particularly regarding sigillography representations. These representations are generally studied in isolation and compared with Zoroastrian orthodoxy as known to us from textual sources[iii]. This comparison leads sometimes to an exact interpretation by correspondence with a cosmogonic, astrological, etc. motive of Zoroastrian doctrine (Grenet 2013; Gnoli 1993).


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Figure 1: a. Sasanian seal, Oriental Institute Museum (A3731), photo: PFA Project. **b.** Sasanian bullae, Qasr-i Abu Nasr excavation, National Museum of Iran (1910095), photo: D. Poinsot

More generally, the interpretation of the images remains attached to what we know about Zoroastrianism in late antiquity (for example Jakubiak 2011). This "Zoroastrian approach" is relevant and can be explained by the weight of this Church in the functioning of Sasanian society. Imperial and clerical power were closely linked, and the Zoroastrian priests had an important place in the state administration (Azarnouche 2018a: 126 and ff). It is therefore legitimate to consider that the iconographies of the seals used in this administration must have had a link with Zoroastrian doctrine. Moreover, the Zoroastrian approach also depends on the state of the sources, particularly on the textual sources, the vast majority of which belong to the Zoroastrian corpus[iv]. However, if the Zoroastrian dimension is to be considered in the analysis of the iconographies of the Sasanian glyptic, its pre-eminence should be qualified. Shaul Shaked's work has shown the existence of a

variety of religious practices in Sasanian Iran (Shaked 1994). If the seals were indeed used within a Zoroastrian administration, they were also used by users who could therefore belong to other religious communities[v]. and for whom the iconography then took on a non-Zoroastrian meaning[vi]. Considering animal figuration as a witness of the human-animal relationship, moving away from Zoroastrian doctrine makes sense when studying the bestiary. Indeed, in this man-animal relationship, the religious dimension is far from being the only binding factor. The study of this relationship in ancient societies also touches on social, economic, material and cultural history. (Pastoureau 2004: 31). In the case of Sasanian Iran, the meaning of animal iconography is therefore not limited to its Zoroastrian dimension. Thus, the bestiary can also be considered as a reflection of human comprehension of their natural environment. In the Sasanian era, this understanding of the natural environment was then reinterpreted in the medium of glyptic and created images that were valid for sealing.

The Bighorn Sheep's Case

To understand this process of reinterpretation, it is first necessary to define what the natural environment is in the Sasanian era and how humans interacted with it. For this type of analysis, archaeozoological data are valuable. Bone assemblages for the Sasanian period are few, but some have been analyzed, particularly those from the excavations of the wall at Gorgān (Mashkour et al. 2013), the Geoktchik Depe site (Mashkour 1998), Merw (Smith 1997) and Siraf (von Driesch & Dockner 2002). It is then necessary to define the natural environment within the glyptic and for this purpose to identify its species as precisely as possible[vii]. Archaeozoology and iconographic data can then be compared to determine what has been retained from the natural environment in glyptic imagery[viii].

The main feature of the assemblages found in excavations is the strong presence of domestic bovine (sheep and goat) bones, which also attest to the importance of these species in the subsistence economy. *Suidae* bones are also well represented at these four sites, although to a lesser extent than the *bovidae*. These seem to belong mainly to the domestic species (pig), but some bones from the wild species (wild boar) have been identified, notably on the Gorgān wall site (Mashkour 2013: 561). Finally, the

four sites have wild *ovis* (bighorn sheep) and *capra* (ibex or goat) bones, which indicate that these animals were hunted and eaten, although their share in the subsistence economy is much lower than that of domestic *bovidae*. In addition, wild carnivore bones have been found at the Geotchik Depe site, which testify that these animals were hunted for fur exploitation (Mashkour 1998: 203). Archaeozoology data indicate a pastoral economy based mainly on the breeding of sheep and goats, which were also largely part of the regular diet. This diet could be supplemented by pig farming and, to a lesser extent, hunting, especially wild boars, sheep and goats. Finally, on coastal sites, fish were fully part of the regular diet, as shown by the Siraf site (von Driesh & Dockner 2002).

In glyptic, there is a strong emphasis on species that can be observed in nature. The bestiary is made up of 37 to 38 different animals, including imaginary and mythological animals. Of these 37 to 38 animals, 35 can be identified as real, non-mythical animals[ix]. In addition, wildlife appears to have been favored, with 27 representatives[x]. Among these, the lion, deer, bear, big feline, wild boar, bighorn sheep and horned quadrupeds form a subgroup of the animals hunted by the king during royal hunting[xi]. The remaining twenty species are mainly birds, perhaps hunted or used for hunting, in the case of raptors. With regard to domestic species, it is the working animal that tends to be chosen for inclusion on the seals: the horse, as the mount of the king and nobles, in court as in war; the dromedary and the camel as caravan animal (Poinsot 2021); and the zebu used for ploughing[xii]. Despite the presence of these hardworking animals, the fauna of the Sasanian glyptic is above all a wild fauna composed of prey animals for hunting and birds.

Finally, when comparing archaeozoological and iconographic data, we notice on the one hand a conformity between iconographically hunted animals and actually hunted animals. However, this conformity must be qualified, since the iconography of hunting belongs to a royal context and testifies to an aristocratic practice. The more common hunting practice evidenced by the bones found in the excavation must have been different, even though the prey is quite similar. On the other hand, it should be pointed out that animals raised to be eaten *(e.g.* domestic sheep and goats) are absolutely not represented in the iconography.

It is remarkable, for example, that the wild bighorn sheep is preferred to the domesticated ram[xiii]. Both are meaningful for the Zoroastrian tradition. The ram is the astrological sign of the Aries. In the Middle Persian text of the *Bundahišn* [xiv]are given the names of the whole zodiac (Rafaelli 2001), and the term used for Aries is *warrag*, which is also the lexeme used to name the domesticated species (MacKenzie 1971: 87). In addition, in the Zoroastrian tradition, the ram is one of the forms that the *farr* can take[xv]. The *farr* is a luminous entity given by the gods to men, especially kings, symbolizing their legitimate authority (Gnoli 1999). On the other hand, the bighorn sheep is one of the avatar of Vahrām[xvi], a very important god in the Zoroastrian pantheon. But in the ram's case, there should have been also an important dimension for the everyday life of the non-aristocratic classes, a dimension that also goes beyond religious matters. Indeed, the economy of the Iranian plateau is marked, as still today, by the practice of pastoralism (Digard 1993), in which the male animal which allows the herd to reproduce is extremely important.

Then, what has not been retained from the natural environment within the glyptic are the main animals in the ordinary diet, raised as grazing animals such as sheep or goats. There are no food taboos specific to meat in Zoroastrianism (Daryaee 2012: 236; Gignoux 1994)[xvii]. In addition, small livestock could have been used in sacrifice (Boyce 1990). From the point of view of the user of the seal, who may not be Zoroastrian, this absence is remarkable, due to the importance of grazing livestock in the economy and livelihood of Iranian society in late antiquity (Gyselen 1997)[xviii]. What is retained is not the animal essential to the ordinary but the animal, as we have seen comparing the archaeozoological data and iconographical data, hunted by the king.

Figure 2: Bighorn sheep, Sasanian seal, British Museum (119850), ©Trustees of the British

The theme of hunting, and more broadly, the theme of the hunter-king, are millennia old and widespread in all the cultures of the ancient Near East: one of its oldest representations can be found on the so-called lion-hunt stele at Uruk, dating to circa 3000 BCE (Seyer 2006: 171). The figure of the hunter-king seems to be linked, rather quickly, to the figure of the victorious king. The art of the New Kingdom Egypt gives us an example of these two topoi's affinity. On the chest of Tutankhamun's treasure, the pharaoh is depicted fighting against his enemies on the sidewalls, and against various animals on the lid (Seyers 2006: 174). In Mesopotamia, during the Assyrian

period, one can also see here a very close link between royal hunting, and particularly the hunting of lions, and war. Thus, in the palace of Assurnasipal II in Nimrud, the two themes are echoed in the bas-reliefs of the throne room (Cassin 1981: 377), allowing the emphatic portrait of the victorious king to be portrayed, both in hunting and in war. In the Sasanian period, the representation of the hunter-king remains an important element of royal iconography. The many silver dishes found in the Caucasus, intended as diplomatic gifts, depict the king, usually on horseback, killing a variety of prey: the lion, of course, but also the bear, the deer, the gazelle and the bighorn sheep (Harper 1981). The theme of the victorious royal hunt can also be found in the bas-reliefs sculpted by the Sasanian kings. In the Taq-e Bostan grotto, a royal deer hunt is carved on the sidewalls on one side and a royal boar hunt on the other. Finally in Shar Mashad, King Vahrām II is depicted confronting two lions (Gignoux 1983: Fig.2 pl.1). The hunter-king theme, as a surrogate of the victorious king at war, is still vividly used in the Sasanian period, being settled in a millennia old expression of kingship in the ancient Near East. Choosing to represent animals hunted by the king on the seals could be offer a shorthand[xix] that speaks to royal glory and the legitimacy of imperial power. The concept of legitimacy, of validity, is particularly important for objects such as seals. Seals were generally used to identify someone, to authenticate a document or to sign a contract between two parties. For this, they need to be valid and recognized by the administration in which they served. Bearing an iconography that proclaims royal glory and affirms the legitimacy of the sovereign, through an animal prey to royal hunting, could give the seal administrative validity.

Thus, the bestiary of the Sasanian glyptic period bears witnesses to a process of reinterpretation of the natural environment. This phenomenon of reinterpretation can be characterized by the comparison between archaeological and archaeozoological data, which show human interaction with their environment, and iconographic data, which show both knowledge of this environment and the imagination attached to it. The study of the Sasanian bestiary shows that the reinterpretation of the natural environment requires a preference for wild animals, and among them a preference for hunted animals, excluding animals raised on pasture. This preference can be explained by the cultural importance of hunting as a tool for legitimizing political power. The king's victory in the hunt is a demonstration of his right to govern. By representing a reduced version of the royal hunt, the prey,

the legitimacy of the political power installed is allowed to appear on an object used for authentication, validation and protection. Thus, through the iconography of hunting prey, the seal becomes valid and usable.

The Lion's Case

The lion is the most represented animal in the Sasanian bestiary, which can be explained by its particular link to the representation of royal glory throughout the ancient East (Cassin 1981). Prey reserved for the king during royal hunts (Briant 1981: 217), its majority use within the Sasanian administration is also partly understood by the "“hunt"” validation process described above. However, Zoroastrian doctrine classifies it among the species of *gūrg* (wolf) (Pakzad 2005: 263–265; Azarnouche 2016: 3-4) which are considered to belong to the Evil Spirit Anγra Maniuu. The purpose of this study is to propose an understanding of glyptic iconography that goes beyond Zoroastrianism but also considers it since the seals were used to validate and authenticate within an administration partly linked to the Zoroastrian Church. It is therefore remarkable that the iconography most used in this administration is precisely that of an animal considered as a bad one[xx].

To understand this apparent inconsistency, it is necessary to look more closely at how the lion is depicted in the Sasanian seals. The iconography of the glyptic bestiary is generally composed of animals represented as a single subject. These animals form iconographic series that are divided into variants defined according to the animal's posture. Thus, the lion type forms a series declined in variants "sitting", "walking", "lying", etc. A descriptive statistical analysis makes it possible to study the co-occurrence ratio between type (species) and position and highlights the choice of one variant over another. This type of analysis therefore makes it possible to question the choice of iconography: is it only about the species that is preferred, or a particular way of representing a species? In other words, does a user choose only a lion, or precisely a walking or lying lion? More broadly, the question is to know which elements carry semantic meaning in glyptic imagery, if the symbolism is related to the animal alone. The aim is to understand how the iconography of the seals works, i.e. how the administrative image works.

The two graphs below (Fig. 3) are a visualization of the number of individual attestations for each ""lion" type position on the one hand, and the number of individual attestations according to the position of the head when the lion is lying on the other hand[xxi]. We can see that the lion is therefore mainly represented laying down, the head in alignment with the body. This specific position of the head corresponds to the sleeping position. Indeed, when the lion is lying down, he can either be shown as watchful, with his head straightened up, or sleeping with his head let go (Morin-Garraud 2001: 17-18). The Sasanian glyptic therefore favours the representation of the sleeping lion (Fig. 4 on the following page).

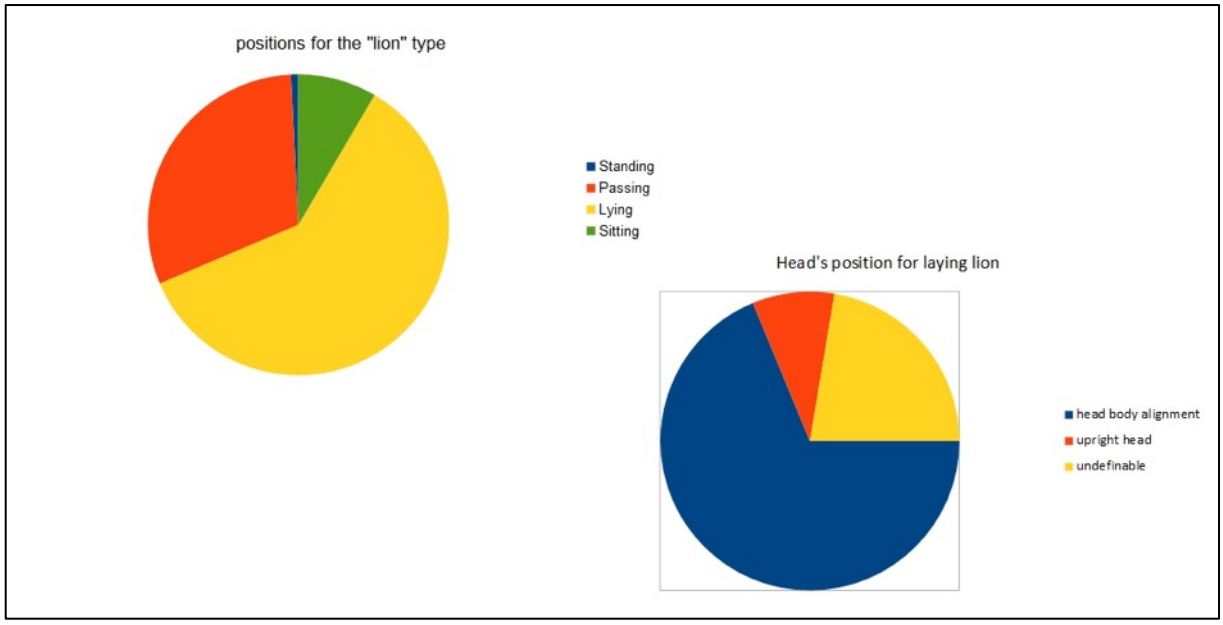

Figure 3: Graphs, on the left: occurrences according to the lion's postures; on the right: occurrences according to the different head's positions for the laying lion

This specific iconography testifies first of all to a rather precise observation of animal behaviour in nature, since the iconography of the glyptic distinguishes the waking position from that of sleep. This observation could be made in paradises[xxii], the royal parks that held reserves of prey for royal hunts (Gignoux 1983). It is not known precisely who had access to paradises and whether lapicides had the opportunity to observe the behaviour of lions. Nevertheless, the representation of the sleeping lion widely represented in glyptics raises the possibility of the existence and transmission of "models"[xxiii] which would be disseminated on the basis of observations made in the royal parks. In addition, this imagery raises questions about the role of seals

beyond the action of sealing. It makes it possible to consider these objects as a support for the diffusion of zoological knowledge[xxiv], whether or not this diffusion has been sought.

Figure 4: Asleep lion, Sasanian seal, British Museum (119822), ©Trustees of the British Museum

Moreover, the lion is the only animal of the Sasanian glyptic that is represented asleep[xxv]. Thus, within the bestiary, a specific iconographic choice was made about this animal. It also seems that the sleeping lion is a new motif of the Sasanian period[xxvi]. This can be understood if one considers that the image of the sleeping lion is adapted the administration in which it is used. From the Zoroastrian administration's point of view, one can suggest that the lion's evil character is soften by using an iconography of the lion in a more vulnerable position.

Thus, the case of the lion testifies to the way in which the precise representation of a species makes it possible to validate an image within the Zoroastrian administration. First of all, a form of incoherence between the glyptic bestiary and Zoroastrian orthodoxy was observed. The animal most commonly used in the sealing practices of the Sasanian administration is precisely an animal belonging to the Evil Spirit in Zoroastrian orthodoxy. To understand this inconsistency, it is necessary to look at the most common way of representing the lion in the glyptic in order to determine which behaviour or aspect of this animal was represented. It appears that in the Sasanian glyptic, the lion was mainly a sleeping animal. However, by depicting the sleeping lion, we represent it vulnerable and allow its iconography to be adapted to Zoroastrian doctrine. Therefore, in the case of the lion, the natural environment is transposed to glyptics because it allows the adequacy between the royal tradition that

associates the lion with glory, and Zoroastrian doctrine that considers the lion as an animal of the Evil Spirit.

Conclusion

The images that came to us via the Sasanian glyptic corpus were used in a particular context, that of sealing. They therefore had an administrative, or even legal, dimension, since they were part of authentication, validation or protection processes. As the bestiary is considered as a way of expressing man's interaction with his environment, one may wonder how much of this interaction is involved in the construction of images of an administrative nature. To propose answers to this question, we can determine what has been retained from human interaction with the natural environment or from the observation of this environment in the images of the bestiary. We can then understand the way in which aspects of the human-animal relationship also have an administrative value. This study pointed out that the glyptic bestiary is mainly made up of animals that work for humans and especially of animals that are hunted by humans, and more precisely by the king. Here it is the relationship between man and the animal prey to hunting that has an administrative value, hunting having a symbolic dimension for the political power. Among the animals hunted, some are particularly poorly considered by Zoroastrian doctrine. This is the case of the lion, which is nevertheless the most represented animal in the glyptic. The observation of the animal world – and the observation that the lion is an animal that sleeps a lot - allows the adaptation of iconography to Zoroastrian doctrine. If the bestiary of the Sasanian glyptic finds many resonances in the Zoroastrian doctrine, it is also partly a reflection of the relationship that man in Iran in late antiquity had with the animal world. This bestiary, by its very nature and by its presence on sealing objects, is therefore at the interface between religious doctrine, political conception, imagination developed around the environment and the actual environment.

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iOn the cult of fire in Zoroastrianism, see Boyce 1987.

ii Clay balls used to seal a document or container and to which one or more prints were affixed.

iii These textual sources are, on the one hand, the books of the Avesta, a collection of texts of a liturgical nature (Lecoq 2016); and, on the other hand, the commentary on the books of the Avesta and the development of Zoroastrian doctrine in the Middle Persian language (Macuch 2009 and Daryaee 2018).

iv Within this corpus, two texts must be mentioned that do not strictly belong to Zoroastrian doctrine: *Karnamag ī*

Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān (Book of Ardāšīr, son of Pābag), which is all that remains of chivalry literature in the Middle Persian language (Grenet 2003 : 25); and the *Husraw ī Kawādān ud rēdag-ē* (Khosrow son of Kawād and one page), which represents wisdom literature (Azarnouche 2013 : 31).

[v] On the different religious communities in Sasanian Iran, see Payne 2015.

vi Some Sasanian seals have been identified as strictly Christian (Lerner: 1977).

vii For a complete identification of the glyptic bestiary, see Poinsot 2018: 139 and ff.

viii The precise identification of animals represented in the glyptic to a known species (or taxon), if it may seem artificial, facilitates comparison with archaeozoological data using the current zoological taxonomy.

ix Among the mythological types are the composite bull-human being Gobedshah and two other types whose differentiation is not certain: Sēnmurw (on the Senmurw representation see Comparetti 2006a and 2006b), a fabulous bird with a lion's body, and the griffin. There remain thirty-five real species, some of which can be represented with a pair of wings (mainly the horse, but also the bighorn sheep and to a lesser extent the lion). These animals exist both with and without wings, so we count them among the real species to which is added an attribute, such as a pair of wings.

x Domestic species: horse, dromedary, camel, zebu, rooster.
Wild species: Lion, deer, bear, hare, rodent, fox, big feline, elephant, wild boar, bighorn sheep, horned cattle (two species), monkey, guinea fowl, pheasant, peacock, crane, duck, goose type, falconiform, raven, partridge, scorpion, crab, snake, fish type.
Non-classifiable species: canine, small feline.

xi See the iconography of Sasanian silverware depicting numerous scenes of royal hunting as well as the rock reliefs in Taq-e Bustan depicting a scene of wild boar hunting and a deer hunting scene. *Splendeur des Sassanides* 1993 and *Les Perses sassanides* 2006.

xii See the representations of ploughing scenes on some seals. Gyselen 1994 : 15.1, 2 and 3 pl.VIII.

xiii The animal I identify with the bighorn sheep in the glyptic has long been confused with the ram. However, an identification study carried out with Ms. Marjan Mashkour (Archaeozoologist, DR, CNRS, UMR 7209 Archaeozoology, Archaeobotany) confirmed this identification with the wild species.

xiv This middle-persian text is a compilation and commentary on Zoroastrian cosmogony and cosmography as described in the texts of the Avesta. Its last compilation was made at the beginning of the Islamic period by a Zoroastrian priest named Farrbay (for a recent commentary on the *Bundahišn,* see Azarnouche 2018b and Azarnouche 2019).

xv As it is recorded in the middle persian text *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān (Book of Ardašīr, son of Pābag),* Grenet 2003.

xvi This can be find in the Vahrām Yašt, an hymn dedicated to the god Vahrām (Lecoq 2016 : 527 and ff), The text in avestan uses the word *meš-auruna,* usually understand as “wild ram”, or bighorn sheep.

xvii Zoroastrian orthodoxy mainly prohibits the killing of certain animals, for example, the dog that is involved in the proper performance of a number of rituals (Boyce 1995).

xviii Thus, the representation of a ram could lead to the user of such a seal being linked to the role of breeder. In the case of a bighorn sheep, the link is more difficult to make, although it should not be excluded that the wild species may have represented the domestic species.

xix Complex scenes seem not to have been much sought after in Sasanian glyptics. It should be keep in mind that the seals were intended for all layers of the society and that their production and engraving represented a cost that could be significant for users belonging to the lowest layers (Callieri 2014: 175 and following). Representing a single animal, prey to royal hunting, could be an economical way to assert the royal glory and legitimacy of the sovereign.

xx The Zoroastrian doctrine on the classification of animals was probably not known to everyone and the uninitiated may have had no qualms about choosing a lion. However, it should be added that the lion was entering the "economy of salvation" (S. Azarnouche): killing a lion could help tip the balance of the afterlife in your favour! (Based on the text of *Pahlavi Rivayat*, Williams Edition and Translation, 1990.) Without necessarily applying this economy, it can be assumed that the Zoroastrians in Iran in late antiquity were then aware of the lion's bad status within their own religion.

xxi Analysis carried out on the basis of 3302 iconographies from seals and bullae and collected in a database during the doctoral project.

xxii I thank Frantz Grenet for that suggestion

xxiii The use of the term "model" seems to imply a fairly strictly controlled production of glyptic from an iconographic point of view. In the current state of the sources, it is difficult to know how they were produced, and whether they were produced, in whole or in part, by royal workshops, for example.

xxiv The expression "zoological knowledge" seems rather appropriate to characterize the bestiary of the Sasanian glyptic. It testifies to a precise observation of nature, from both an ethological and morphological point of view. For example, felids passing in the Sasanian seals are always represented with the tip of the tail raised in an arc. This is indeed a characteristic of felines and it is what makes it possible to distinguish them from canids.

xxv Some animals (zebu, bighorn sheep, deer) are represented crouching, but never asleep.

xxvi We have not found any examples of this in ancient Mesopotamian, Achaemenid, Greek, Roman or Egyptian

traditions. The latter seems to have preferred the lion in waking. The most famous evidence of sleeping lion figures are the sculptures found in American cemeteries in the 19th century, which represent the warrior's rest.

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