



# A STONE HUMAN BUST FROM TOMB-E BOT, FARS, IRAN

ALIREZA ASKARI CHAVERDI\*

## INTRODUCTION

**T**OMB-E BOT is not far from the Persian Gulf, in the plain of Lamerd and Mohr, in south Fars, at latitude of 27°44'268" north, and longitude of 52°39'122" east, and at an elevation of 500 meters above the sea level, some 60 km northeast of the port of Siraf.

The site was originally identified and published during the archaeological surveys of 1998.<sup>1</sup> The surface assemblages from the site were systematically analyzed and published as part of the present author's MA dissertation, presented at the Tehran University,<sup>2</sup> whilst the hinterland plain was selected for an extensive survey because of the site's importance.<sup>3</sup> Finally, portions of the site were excavated by the joint team of the Shiraz University and Shiraz Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Directorate under the general direction of the present author. Among the archaeological findings, there are architectural elements made in stone, like columns and capitals with volutes and addorsed animal protomes in a provincial Achaemenian style, two statues of eagle, fragmented fire altars, and a stone human bust, which is the subject of the present paper.

## ENVIRONMENTS

Tomb-e Bot lies northwest of the Lamerd and Mohr plain, at the feet of the Tang-e Siyah mountains, 100 meters north of the modern village of Shaldan (FIG. 1). The central part of the site covers



FIG. 1. Archaeological site of Tomb-e Bot. View from the northeast.

\* Shiraz University (aaskari@rose.shirazu.ac.ir).

<sup>2</sup> IDEM 2001.

<sup>1</sup> ASKARI CHAVERDI 1999, 67-72; Id. 2002, 277-278.

<sup>3</sup> ASKARI CHAVERDI, AZARNOUSH 2004, 3-18.





FIG. 2. Tomb-e Bot. Human bust. Front view.



FIG. 3. Tomb-e Bot. Human bust. Side view.

an area of about 1 hectare, overlaid by a farmland that is hemmed in on three sides – Mount Tang-e Siyah to the north, and the low archaeological mounds of Tomb-e Sefid, Qaleh Ruh al-Din and Qaleh Shaldan to the east and west. Together with the surrounding archaeological sites and the adjacent foothill Tomb-e Bot covers an area of about 5-7 hectares. Scattered potsherds occur on this part of the piedmont, making the demarcation of the central part of the site difficult. The farmland overlapping part of the sites depends on an irrigation well, and the local wells yield potable water. The soil is fit for farming, lying utterly on agricultural and stockbreeding. In the farmland, the fields are invariably framed by stands of indigenous tamarisks, which serve as barriers to protect crops against currents of warm and cold winds. Some 800 meters to the south, the River Mehran flows eastward in rainy season. In recent years, plowing has exposed a series of stone structural elements, the most striking of which include 3 cubic capitals with volutes, 3 animal headed capitals, 2 eagle statues, and a fragmentary human bust, which is described below. These finds come from the central part of the site, which is the focus of agricultural activities at present.<sup>4</sup>

#### BUST DESCRIPTION

The bust (Figs. 2-3) represents a man in full face carved of limestone. The extant figure measures 27 cm in height and is 9.100 kg in weight. Parts of the head and face are missing. The fat, round face features fleshy cheeks and pronounced eyes. The right eye is missing, but the left, almost intact, has prominent lines and lacks the pupil. The flat, high nose has lost parts of its surface. The half-open mouth is framed by wide lips, and the wide ears are turned forward. The neck is very short and stubby, as if the round body of the figure directly touched the head. A row of small raised dots girdles the rounded bottom part of the bust, roughly 15 cm in diameter.

<sup>4</sup> ASKARI CHAVERDI 1999, 67-72; IDEM 2002, 277-278.





The man's frizzy hair is puffed, with curls trailing on both sides over his shoulders and fastened by two ribbons at the back. Top of the head is unfortunately broken, but judging from what remains of it, the figure probably wore a crown that was broken off except for part of its base. The beard, partially preserved below the right earlobe and below the chin, is described by circular projections. The figure wears a pendant necklace and earrings. The former consists of round, large beads, with a big, protrusive pendant, apparently of a precious stone, hanging from its center. Earrings constitute large pearls attached to earlobes by small rings. An open-collared pleated tunic is ornamented with a row of raised dots around the neckband.

#### CARVING TECHNIQUE

The bust was carved from a white limestone of tawny type. The material is almost the same as that used in the other related finds from the site, including the capitals and eagle sculptures, which comes from the nearby mountain very probably. Clear indications of wooden wedges used in removing the carved stone are preserved, as 20-cm-deep indentations at the quarry lying some 150 m to the north of Tomb-e Bot.<sup>5</sup> Here, following the same traditional method of the Achaemenian quarries, large stone blocks were removed from the mountain using wooden wedges and moved to workshops. Therefore, the important point is that these objects, in particular the bust described here, were locally produced using tawny limestone deriving from the nearby quarries.

The bust, with its circular profile, consists of a head, crown, neck and chest; the bottom was rounded to facilitate its attachment to some sort of a base, possibly a round column shaft (FIGS. 4-6), according to a typology characterizing some of the stone busts dated to the Parthian, Sassanian and even Roman times, and, geographically, the plaster busts attached to engaged columns of the entrances at the Sassanian structure of Hajjiabad, Fars, dating to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, which is not far from Tomb-e Bot.<sup>6</sup> The stepped shape of the bottom suggests that the bust was perhaps mounted on a socketed stone pedestal and would be removed as occasion arose. This represented an innovative attaching technique and might witness to the high level of importance the local community reached on displaying the bust during special occasions.

The steps were cut on a lathe machine using a 8 mm quasi-flat chisel, whereas the bust itself was sculpted by a wide variety of tools, as the diverse carving methods, witnessed in the different sorts of statues, capitals and fire altars deriving from the site, suggest, as well as the application of an array of drills, mallets and abrasives. Indeed, carving techniques were already well-established in the Fars region since the Achaemenian period, and the same tradition is reflected in the stone objects from Tomb-e Bot.

The extremely compressed chest of the figure gives the impression that the sculptor neglected the description of this part, consecrating his full effort to the head and physiognomic features. Only obliterated traces of drapery folds from a pleated tunic are discernible on the left and right sides of chest. The folds were roughed out with a 0.5 mm chisel at the end of the arms. The rough chest was then furnished with a series of fine parallel undulating grooves. At some points around the neck and head-neck junction, marks are visible of a claw chisel with tiny, 1 mm teeth, which was used for roughing in the surface. Refining the chest and arms in both front and back sides was carried out by a 0.5 mm chisel with five tiny teeth.

Despite all the damages and fractures, the round face of the bust with its fleshy cheeks, wide lips, open and prominent eyes and a forehead that projects out in the frontal view, still gives an impression of a clam and firm countenance. The craftsman started with a flat chisel to rough out the face and turned to a 2 mm point drill to render the curves of the eyes and lips. The eye sockets with open eyelids measuring 2 cm and the wide mouth with closed lips were similarly drilled. The entire face was worked with a fine chisel and rasp to make visible the fine lines of eye corners, lips and nose. The soft rock enabled outlining the face with a point and subsequently refining it by a fine chisel and eventually smoothing and bringing out the facial features using a fine abrasive. The face has a

<sup>5</sup> IDEM 2001, 9.

<sup>6</sup> AZARNOUSH 1994, 136; see CALLIERI 2016.





FIG. 4. Tomb-e Bot. Human bust. Front view  
(drawing by Z. Norouzi).

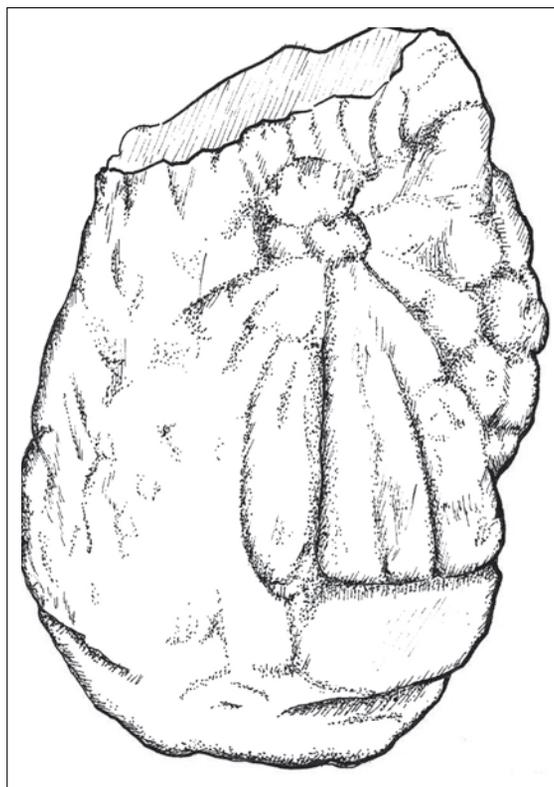


FIG. 5. Tomb-e Bot. Human bust. Side view  
(drawing by Z. Norouzi).

span of 11 cm from the right to left earlobe, and as stated earlier, the chin bears a beard. The projecting, almost 5-mm-diameter, circles forming the beard were first roughed in by a 3-5 mm oblique flat chisel and then by a 2 mm point chisel; this was followed by a refining work of a flat chisel before the final rasping.

The hair dress is particularly important; the tresses were topped with a now missing crown, of which only portions of the lowest part are preserved. From under the crown, the plaited curly hairs hang down on both sides and are tied with a double ribbon at the back. The crown, based on the 3 cm height of its remaining base, was carved with a flat chisel, and oblique semi-flat chisels of different sizes were used to indicate the horizontal lines that form the ribbons. The wavy hairs were fashioned by a flat and a semi-flat chisel about 1 cm and 0.5 cm in diameter, respectively. This was followed by drilling 2-3 cm spirals to indicate individual locks in relief. The wavy hair of the figure was thus in a puffy form, a hairstyle somehow recalling the old tradition attested across southwest Asia in various forms of the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC.

Pearls of the earrings and associated rings involved the skillful use of a semi-flat chisel before they were finished by a fine rasp. Constituting the decorative element of the chest, the necklace consists of 7 big circular beads on either side, each running from the earlobe to the chest, and a square pendant at the center. This necklace separates our bust, though only to some extent, from the dull, rough traditional style, and contributes to its enlivenment. Its beads were carved in regular parallel rows using an oblique semi-flat chisel; they were then rasped into circular forms after individual beads were separated through drilling a fine groove between them.

#### TYPOLGY AND CHRONOLOGY

The Tomb-e Bot bust still displays some degree of dullness and stagnancy, notwithstanding the fact that it represents a sculpture in the round technique and sports a combined carving technique that



made use of oblique flat chisels and drills (in the drapery fold lines and hair dress), and even rasps to varnish the tawny limestone. Despite the artist's other attempts to depart from the characteristic tradition of the Parthian sculpture in southwest Iran, as evidenced by the use of ribbons, necklace and earrings, the general style still falls into the category of some oriental traditions, our the bust reflects the same Parthian stylistic and technical properties attested at Hatra, Palmyra and even Bard-e Neshandeh and **Masjede Soleiman**, though the decorations of its face and hair go beyond the mid-Parthian period and appear to be closer to the late Parthian methods, which prevailed in the Fars region in particular.

The technique involving chisel and drill in cutting limestone statues came to the fore in about AD 150 at all Parthian sites in Iran and Syro-Mesopotamia, in particular Palmyra and Hatra,<sup>7</sup> and was built on the experiences of south-west Iran ateliers and early experiments with marble statues. Nevertheless, sculpting industries in individual Asian communities were affected by multiple cultural factors and religious and political aims, as well as local and regional patronage.

Therefore, the ways in which the statues were roughed out, refined and finished, and their facial features brought out, were contingent on a plethora of factors, like the taste of the local ruling class and noblemen: these determined the tools, raw materials and sculpting techniques of choice. This reason accounts for the technical idiosyncrasies exhibited by the Parthian sculptural works from Palmyra, Dinavar, Dehnow, Malyan, Hatra, Bard-e Neshandeh and Susa.<sup>8</sup> From this perspective, one may surmise that the bust from Tomb-e Bot falls technically in the same category as the other limestone statues of the Parthian period. Furthermore, given the survival of the Achaemenian traditions in the region, it displays a higher level of expertise, albeit with local traits, when compared with relevant material from other Parthian sites.

However, this bust is distinguished from the rest of known Parthian sculptures by its iconography, particularly the ornaments. In particular, none of the Parthian instances reported from the abovementioned sites and regions wear earrings and necklace. In fact, adorning busts with a necklace of pearl-shaped beads and a big pendant is more typical of the Sassanian art. These iconographic features are attested on almost all royal statues and coins from the entire Sassanian period and one may hardly find a Sassanian royal representation lacking these ornaments.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in the light of other contemporary finds from the site of Tomb-e Bot and basing on one side on the stylistic analysis of the bust linking it to the Parthian sculpting tradition of the early AD centuries on the other of its iconography typical of the Sassanian period, for the origins of the decorative style of the Tomb-e Bot bust one should look at the pre- and early-Sassanian periods in Fars.<sup>10</sup> Before the Sassanian times, similar iconographic features occur in representations of the kings of Persis, the local independent state ruling over Fars, especially in the late Parthian era, on the coins of such kings as Ardashir V and Shapur son of Babak belonging to the very end of the Parthian period. Be-

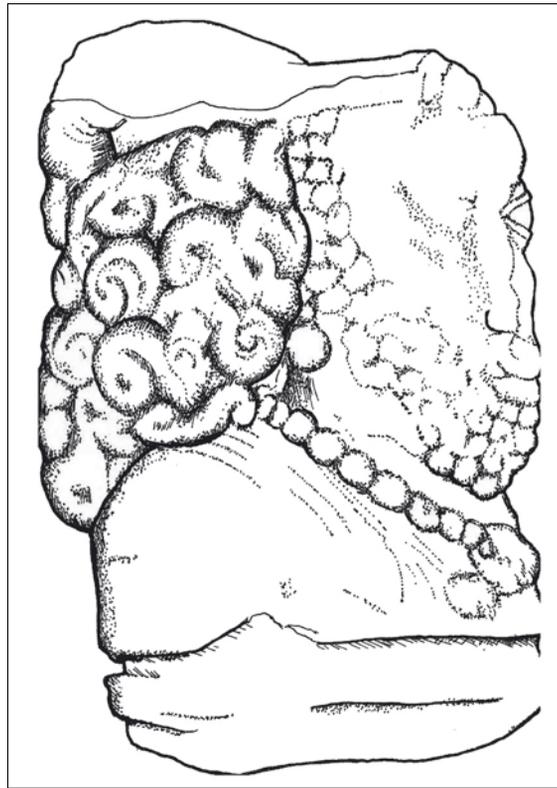


FIG. 6. Tomb-e Bot. Human bust. Back view (drawing by Z. Norouzi).

<sup>7</sup> COLLEGE 1979, 234.

<sup>8</sup> KAWAMI 1987, 315.

<sup>9</sup> HERMANN 1972, 151-12.

<sup>10</sup> KAWAMI 1987, 319.





sides, presence of these ornaments on the bust from Tomb-e Bot might suggest that it represented a political or religious personage, since these iconographic features were used in the portraits of the royal families of both the local independent state of Persis in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD as well as in the Sassanian Empire in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

In addition, by stylistic comparisons with the crowns and headgears on numismatic evidence, the broken base of the crown of this figure can tentatively be interpreted as the hair on the top of the head was covered in a korymbos, the same tradition that occurs in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD coinage and stone reliefs of Ardashir I, as a bun wrapped in a fine fabric on top of the king's head and continues into the Sassanian period as a globe surmounting the crown. The harbinger of this type of hair dress in the pre-Sassanian period is the crown of Shapur son of Babak, a later self-proclaimed king of Persis, who ruled in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD.<sup>11</sup> Radiocarbon analyses allow us to date the excavated material from Tomb-e Bot to ca. 80-260 AD.<sup>12</sup> If we accept the late Parthian attribution on stylistic grounds, a production date roughly in the end of the Parthian period can be then proposed on this premise.

Surface finds collected during the survey of the southeast quadrant of the site, and the results of the stratigraphic excavation in the area where the stone capitals were discovered, have in fact provided a long settlement sequence at tomb-e Bot.<sup>13</sup> Drawing on the radiocarbon dates, the main occupation dates to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD, which marks a period during which Fars witnessed several historical, political and social developments pertaining to the rise of the Sassanian Empire. What is to a great extent demonstrated by the analysis of surface potsherds assemblages is the fact that the site's prosperity peaked in the late Parthian period, an observation also supported by radiocarbon dates.<sup>14</sup> This is also corroborated by the style of artworks collected from the surface of the site and their comparison to other related material from the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD.

#### ABSTRACT

Tomb-e Bot, in south Fars, is a major archaeological site dating to the Parthian and Sassanian periods. It was selected for excavation from a total of 76 sites recorded during the general survey of the region, conducted with the purpose of filling existing gaps in our understanding of ancient Iran, particularly within the period spanning from the Achaemenian to the Sassanian eras. During this survey, architectural remains, among which capitals with volutes and addorsed animal protomes, and other architectural elements visible on the surface as well as surface potsherds were systematically sampled, and attempts were made to draw and record the entire attested finds. Apart from analyzing surface finds, a stratigraphy of existing occupational deposits was established and absolute dates were obtained from radiocarbon samples. The excavated finds from Tomb-e Bot provided a fairly complete chronological sequence that is very useful for these periods in south Fars. The primary result of the excavation there conducted and of the subsequent analyses is that the site has partially filled the historical lacuna existing between the decline of the Achaemenian and the rise of the Sassanian Empire. Among the most interesting finds from the site is a limestone human bust (or fragmentary statue) rendered in the Parthian-Sassanian style. Studying this bust along with the other finds from the site will shed light on some trends of the late-Parthian and early-Sassanian sculpture.

KEYWORDS: Bust, Tomb-e Bot, Late Parthian, South Fars, Iran.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALRAM M.

– 1986, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch*, Vol. IV (Nomina Propria Iranica in Nummis), Vienna.

ASKARI CHAVERDI A.

– 1999, *Fars after Darius III: New Evidence from an Archaeological Site in Lamerd, Fars*, «Bastanshenasi va Tarikh», 13:2, 66-72 (in Persian).

– 2001, *Archaeological Survey of Cultural Periods in Lamerd County, Fars*, (Tehran University), Tehran. (in Persian).

<sup>11</sup> ALRAM 1986, 185, taf. 22: nos. 653, 654, 655.

<sup>12</sup> ASKARI CHAVERDI 2013, 19.

<sup>13</sup> ID. 2010, 359.

<sup>14</sup> ID. 2013, 170.





*A stone human bust from Tomb-e Bot, Fars, Iran*

149

- 2002, *Recent Post-Achaemenid Finds from Southern Fars, Iran*, «Iran», 40, 277-278.
  - 2010, *The Evolution of the Achaemenian Legacy in the Fars Region in Light of Archaeological Evidence* (Tarbiat Modares University), Tehran (in Persian).
  - 2013, *Archaeological Investigations of the Persian Gulf Littorals*, (Shiraz University of Arts), Shiraz (in Persian).
- ASKARI CHAVERDI A, AZARNOUSH M.
- 2004, *Survey of Archaeological Sites of the Persian Gulf Hinterland: Lamerd and Mohr, Fars*, «Bastanshenasi va Tarikh», 18:2, 1-18.
- AZARNOUSH M.
- 1994, *The Sasanian Manor house At Hajiabad Iran*, (Monografie di Mesopotamia 3), Firenze.
- CALLIERI P.
- 2016, *The Bust-Pillar: a new type of monument in ancient Iran?*, in C. Cannuyer (ed.), *Entre Orient et Occident. Circulation des hommes, porosité des héritages. Rika Gyselen in honorem*, (Acta Orientalia Belgica, xxix), Bruxelles, 17-28.
- COLLEDGE M. A. R.
- 1979, *Sculptors' Stone-carving Techniques in Seleucid and Parthian Iran, and Their Place in the Parthian Cultural Milieu. Some Preliminary Observations*, «East and West», 29, 221-240.
- HERMANN G.
- 1972, *The Sasanian Rock Reliefs: Some Significant Details*, in M. Kiani, A. Tajvidi (eds.), *The Memorial Volume of the vi<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology*, (Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research), Tehran, 151-162.
- KAWAMI S. T.
- 1987, *Monumental art of the Parthian Period in Iran*, (Acta Iranica 13), Leiden.

