

THE BIRD-SHAPED FINIAL ON ISLAMIC ROYAL PARASOLS: A GHAZNAVID OR FATIMID INNOVATION?

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This paper aims at investigating when and why the bird-shaped finial made its appearance on Islamic parasols through the analysis of written sources and miniature paintings. Evidence attest to the trans-regional and diachronic use of the parasol as a royal insignia whose meaning and value grew wider to symbolise the seat of government, was it the royal tent, palace or throne.

Keywords: parasol; Islamic royal insignia; Iran; Ghaznavids; Fatimids

1. THE LONG-LASTING TRADITION OF THE PARASOL

The parasol, a device to provide shadow repairing from the sun (or snow), is alternatively referred to as *mizalla*, *shamsa*¹ or *shamsiyya* in the Arabic-speaking context,² and *chatr*³ in the Persian-speaking areas. It is attested as a royal insignia in almost every Islamic dynasty, but the Islamic period was not at all its starting point. In fact, the history of the parasol is far more ancient. The device has been in use throughout a very long period extending from Antiquity to the Modern Age, and in different cultural areas.

Evidence come from Egypt,⁴ Assyria, Achaemenid and Sasanian Persia,⁵ where the parasol is usually held by an attendant standing behind the figure of the king as an attribute of royalty;⁶ a further spread concerned Asia from China⁷ to the west.⁸

Though it majorly spread in the Eastern lands, the parasol (σκιάδειον) was known in Late Archaic and Classical Athens as well. Greece seems to be the only territory where it was not reserved to men.⁹ The depiction of a parasol-bearer attending someone other than a

¹ In some Islamic contexts such as the Abbasid and Fatimid courts, the term *shamsa* might indicate a crown suspended above the caliph's head, not to be confused with the parasol (see Halm 1995; 1997).

² Bosworth 1993, 191-192.

³ The Persian term *chatr* is borrowed from the Sanskrit, thus attesting a very ancient origin of the device and alluding to its use in the Indian context. Monneret de Villard (1968, 270) reports that, before the Hellenism exerted its influence on the Indian art, Buddha was represented through symbols: among these, there were the parasol and the throne. From the term *chatr* derive the variations *shitr* or *jitr*, demonstrating that the oriental origin of the device was still perceived (see Korn 2012, 149). In addition, the term *ṭayyāra* indicated the sunshade placed above the throne of Rustam in Ṭabarī (d. 923; see Friedmann 1992, 82).

⁴ The parasol was known in Egypt since the 3rd millennium BCE (McDonald 1999; cf. also Miller 1992, 93).

⁵ See Muscarella 2013, 817-824, with related bibliography. About the parasol portrayed in the Sasanian reliefs of Ṭāq-i Bustān, see Ghirshman 1962, fig. 237.

⁶ Sims 1992, 77.

⁷ A figure wearing a tiara and carrying a parasol (*chattra*) is depicted on a stone pedestal from the Indian Museum of Calcutta (inv. no. A 25157 B.G. 51): the scene probably refers to a divine episode (see Bénisti 1981-1982, 212, fig. 3). A fragmentary parasol of Han production has been found; both royal and devotional uses are attested in the Buddhist context, and recalled by the stupas as well (for both information see Andrews 1993, 192).

⁸ Two parasols are portrayed in a religious scene on a coin struck by Caracalla (r. 211-217; see Andrews 1993, 192).

⁹ The parasol is depicted as part of the feminine equipment in 4th-century funerary iconography (a maid holds the parasol above the seated lady; see Miller 1992, 92), 6th-century vases (Miller 1992, 95) and in the divine

king in Late Archaic Lycia might be explained as a custom resulted from the cultural influence of Persia.¹⁰

There is no reference to the parasol under the Umayyads; conversely, its use is attested in the Umayyad caliphate of al-Andalus¹¹ and under the Normans¹² that is to say in the western extremities of the Islamic and Islamic influenced territories.

2. THE ROYAL PARASOL AND ITS BIRD-SHAPED FINIAL IN THE IRANIAN LANDS DURING THE ISLAMIC PERIOD

The presence of a bird-shaped finial on top of royal parasols is confirmed for the first time by historical sources during the Ghaznavid period. Fakhr-i Mudabbir (d. 1236) in his *Ādāb al-ḥārb wa'l-shajā'a* writes about the finial topping Sultan Mas'ūd III's parasol:

«In the year 503 [1109] the Sulṭān-i Karīm 'Alā'ud-Dawla Mas'ūd son of Raḍī Ibrāhīm (May God purify their dust!) marched toward Bust. An exquisite, precious and unique pearl fell down from the beak of **the falcon surmounting the Sultan's umbrella**».¹³

This passage provides an information that let the reader to imagine the parasol's finial as a true jewel. It is reminiscent of the Sasanian crown worn by Hormuzd II (r. 303-309) that featured not only the typical spread wings but a complete bird of prey, portrayed by the profile, holding in its beak a drop-shaped element (possibly a pearl).¹⁴ Thus, the presence of a jewelled falcon on top of the royal insignia - attested also under Ibrāhīm (r. 1059-1099) -¹⁵ may have been inspired to the ancient Iranian tradition.¹⁶

context on the Parthenon eastern frieze (Eros holds the parasol above Aphrodite; Miller 1992, 103); in fact, the parasol was a mark of social and political distinction for Athenian ladies since it was reserved to citizens. Few exceptions are attested in the Islamic context. As narrated by Clavijo (ambassador to the Tīmūr's court), in 1404 Tīmūr's first wife Sarāy-Mulk Khātūn made her entry into the court under a white silk parasol (Andrews 1993, 193). A painting (probably Samarakand, 15th century, Istanbul, Saray Topkapı Library, Ms. H. 2153, fol. 165r, cf. Haase 1981, fig. 250) illustrates a scene probably drawn from the history of Solomon transposed into a Timurid setting: a large parasol, held by an angel, shadows a couple carried inside a platform by *jinn*s. Moreover, Shīrīn appears shadowed by a parasol in "Shirin on her way to Farhad", Nizāmī's *Khamsa*, Herat, 1491, Moscow, The Museum of Oriental Art, Ms. 1659 II, fol. 66r, cf. Karpova 1981, not numbered ill. See also fn. 36 about the parasol used by the royal family among the Qarakhanids.

¹⁰ Miller 1992, 94.

¹¹ Flood - Necipoğlu eds. 2017, 242. On portable canopies see Chalmers 1993.

¹² Byzantines and Fatimids represented the royal prototypes Roger II of Sicily (r. 1130-1154) looked at. Depictions in the Cappella Palatina in Palermo show a set of insignia of sovereignty: a variety of headgear, the parasol, which always matched the fabric of the caliph's costume, a sceptre, sword and shield (see Tolar 2011, 32). A parasol (*al-mizalla*) would have been sent to the Norman kings as a gift from the Fatimid caliph (see Flood - Necipoğlu eds. 2017, 379).

¹³ Shafi 1938, 200 (emphasis added).

¹⁴ See Fontana 2012, 95; cf. Erdmann 1951, 99, fn. 47, and also fn. 38, fig. 18; Göbl 1971, pl. 5:14. See also Halm 1995, 131.

¹⁵ Bosworth 1963, 280, fn. 23.

¹⁶ Such a continuity of customs can be traced in the use of a jewelled, suspended crown in vogue among the Sasanian kings as well as under the Abbasid and Fatimid caliphs. See above, fn. 1. Moreover, on the drachms

The court-poet Sayyid Ḥasan (d. 1161) confirms that the parasols of Mas'ūd III and his son Bahrām Shāh (r. 1117-1150; 1152-1157) featured a falcon on their top:

مبارک اوج تخت او فلک را بر کنار آرد خجسته باز چتراو جهان را زیر بردارد¹⁷
 «Blessed be the top of his throne that brings the firmament closer
 Fortunate be **the falcon of his parasol** that raises the world below».¹⁸

Miniatures produced from the mid-14th century onward show episodes related to the Ghaznavid history which can be held as a demonstration of the custom. The bird-shaped finial appears two times in a *Shāhnāma*'s miniature (Iran, 1446) on top of both the throne where Sultan Maḥmūd (r. 998-1030) is seated and the wide parasol above him (fig. 1).¹⁹ It must have been a well-established role to justify such a pleonastic repetition.

A further detail concerning the colour of the Ghaznavid parasol comes from the *Tārīkh-i Mas'ūdī* by Bayhaqī (d. 1077), who reports an episode occurred in the aftermath of the defeat of Dandānqān (1040),²⁰ when the Sultan had to flee to Ghazni leaving everything behind:

«Before the Amir left Rebāt-e Karvān, a trusty messenger arrived from the castellan Bu 'Ali. He brought two **black** ceremonial **parasols**, a black banner and short spears, all placed in a black satin brocade bag, an elephant litter and a mule litter, together with other pieces of equipment, since all these insignia of royalty had been lost (i.e. in the flight from the battlefield)».²¹

A Safavid miniature could confirm the choice of a dark colour: it illustrates a convivial meeting of Firdowsī with three among the Ghaznavid court's poets, 'Unsurī, Farrukhī and 'Asjudī; on the background, there is a man carrying a closed black parasol (fig. 2).²²

Episodes mentioning the parasol without providing any specific detail about its finial abound. The *chatr-dār* was one of the highest tasks a *ghulām* could attain to, along with the standard bearer, the master of the wardrobe, and the armour-bearer;²³ and still before the

issued by the Persian king Phraates IV (r. 40-3 BCE) was depicted a falcon holding a diadem in its beak (see Daryaei - Malekzadeh 2018, 247).

¹⁷ Khan 1949, 83.

¹⁸ I wish to thank Viola Allegranzi for translating from Persian.

¹⁹ The majority of miniatures mentioned as examples in this paper are drawn from this manuscript and the Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, Herat, 1430 ca., Bibliothèque nationale de France, Supplément persan 1113, since they are among the oldest ones attesting bird-shaped finials and fully accessible online.

²⁰ The defeat of Dandānqān cost the Ghaznavids the loss of Khurasan in favour of the Seljuqs.

²¹ Bosworth 2011, II, 338 (emphasis added).

²² The miniature belongs to a *Shāhnāma*'s manuscript started under Shāh Ismā'īl (r. 1501-1524) and completed in 1535 under Shāh Ṭahmāsp (r. 1524-1576), thus known as the "*Shāhnāma* of Shāh Ṭahmāsp". It is currently preserved in Toronto, Aga Khan Museum, Ms. AKM 156, fol. 7r. The isolated figure standing on the right and dressed in yellow might represent Sultan Maḥmūd; he seems to wear a falconer's glove. The poet Mas'ūd-i Sa'd (d. 1121-2) mentions the black canopy of Bahrām Shāh as well (see Khan 1949, 82-83).

²³ Bosworth 1963, 105. On the occurrence of the parasol already under the Samanids, cf. below and fn. 28.

prince Mawdūd ascended the throne, his *ghulāms* were entrusted to carry the ceremonial parasol.²⁴

With regard to the warfare context, the already mentioned *Ādāb al-hārb wa'l-shajā'a* (late 12th-early 13th century) by Fakhr-i Mudabbir narrates the fight between Bahrām Shāh and Muḥammad-i Bā Ḥalīm, who revolted against him:

«The drums were beaten and the army ranged itself in battel order. The ungrateful Moḥammad-i-Bā Ḥalīm spread his **umbrella** and delivered an attack in the centre».²⁵

During the attack led to Lahore, the «*chatar*» (umbrella) is the insignia held above «the infidel pretender» riding a horse on the battlefield.²⁶ Both these passages attest that the parasol was used as an official signal to set the battle starting and that its value of royal insignia was recognised as such beyond the Islamic field. Moreover, during the reign of Mas'ūd III, carrying off the enemy's standard or *chatr* on the battlefield was regarded among the actions that might earn a special reward in the plunder's share.²⁷

The *chatr* must have entered the Ghaznavid court along with the administrative and royal protocols acquired from the Samanids, among those it is attested in the 10th century.²⁸ The custom spread in the Iranian lands so that, in the aftermath of 1092, the *chatr* had become such a highly symbolical device in the Seljuq protocol that a son of Nizām al-Mulk gave Sultan Berkyaruq (r. 1092-1105) «the *sarāparda* and the royal umbrella which are royal insignia (*ālāt-i saltanat az sarāparda wa chatr*)» in the attempt of obtaining the vizierate.²⁹

The Seljuq prince Qāwurd (d. 1073) tried to act as an independent ruler by adopting «the royal insignia of a parasol (*chatr*), stamping on documents a *tughra* or official emblem [...] and assuming the regal titles».³⁰

Among the episodes most frequently illustrated in miniatures there is the meeting of the Seljuq Sanjar (r. 1097-1118) with an old woman: the Sultan is always portrayed mounting a horse and shadowed by a large parasol, which is sometimes topped by a golden bird-shaped finial (fig. 3).³¹ The story is drawn from the first poem of Nizāmī's *Khamsa*, the *Makhzan*

²⁴ Bosworth 1977, 12.

²⁵ Shafī 1938, 226 (emphasis added).

²⁶ Shafī 1938, 214.

²⁷ Bosworth 1963, 126. The loss of insignia corresponded to a loss of power: «the capture, appropriation, or usurpation of a royal standard or parasol could mean defeat or rebellion». To protect the royal insignia was a point of honour on the battlefield; otherwise, the king would be deprived of the visible signs of his authority (see Flood 2009, 122).

²⁸ Bosworth 1963, fn. 23; see also Andrews 1993, 193.

²⁹ See Durand-Guédy 2013, 168.

³⁰ Bosworth 1968, 88.

³¹ For other miniatures illustrating this episode and featuring parasols fitted with bird finials, see, for instance, other paintings from manuscripts of Nizāmī's *Khamsa*: Herat, 15th century, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Diez A fol. 7, fol. 19r (cf. SBB website); Iran, 1529, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Edwin Binney, 3rd, Collection of Turkish Art, Ms. M.85.237.16 (cf. LACM website); Tabriz, 1539-43, London, British Library, Ms. Or. 2265, fol. 18r (cf. Sims - Marshak - Grube 2002, fig. 127). The episode is portrayed in other miniatures, which do not include the bird-shaped finial (cf. Minissale 2000, 61, 107 and followings.).

al-asrār (the *Treasury of Secrets*) but, curiously, Nizāmī makes no mention of the parasol in his text,³² while many miniatures include this detail.³³ A possible explanation could be found in a contamination derived from another episode narrated in Nizāmī's *Dīwān* about the Prophet Muḥammad and the [Turk] king of the Ka'ba, who appears under a black parasol:

دیبای سبز بر تن، چتر سیاه بر سر پرگار حلقه او چون آسمان مدور بر عارض سپیدش خال سیه ز عنبر ³⁴	سلطان کعبه را بین بر تخت هفت کشور او بر سریر شاهی چون خسروان مربع ترکیست تازی اندام و ز بهر دلستانی
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«Look at the Sultan of Ka'ba, on the throne of the seven lands
 Green silk on his body, a **black parasol (čatr-i siyāh)** on his head /
 He, sitting on the royal throne, cross-legged like the kings
 The compass of his ring circular like the sky /
 It's a beloved (Turk) with an Arab body, due to snatching hearts
 On his white face, there is a black mole of ambergris».³⁵

As seen above, black was the colour of the Ghaznavid insignia.³⁶ Since the Seljuqs as much as the Ghaznavids were Sultans of Turkic origin, the black parasol may have been inserted in miniatures to connote the Turkic lineage of Sultan Sanjar. It would thus represent a figurative link between the two dynasties.

³² See Dārāb 1945, 167-169.

³³ Cf. above, fn. 31.

³⁴ Nafīsī 1959, 232.

³⁵ The first and third lines are taken from Lornejad - Doostzadeh 2012, 116, with few corrections by the author. The second line has been translated by Viola Allegranzi.

³⁶ The parasol's colour was probably a communicating detail. Ayyubids and Mamluks used yellow parasols (see Andrews 1993, 193). References in the Persian literature provide images of great impact: the golden parasol, *čatr-i zarrīn*, was intended as a metaphor of the sun, as well as the *čatr-i simīn*, as a metaphor of the full moon with its silvery colour, and the *čatr-i ambarīn* means the darkness of night. Kings of Persian culture were certainly well aware of such poetical imageries and probably considered them in choosing their parasols' fabric (see Sims 1992, 78). The Seljuq Tughril Beg (r. 1037-1063) is known to have entered Nishapur under a red parasol after his conquest. Red tents and standards were in use among the Qarakhanids as well (see Andrews 1993, 193; Durand-Guédy 2013, 171). Among the Qarakhanids a black silk, curved parasol was part of the *'alāmāt al-ḥarb*, emblems of war on the battlefield and the single emblem of rank attributed to the chief minister, while the orange one was reserved for the sovereign and his family. The Khitan parasol was red with a gilt finial. The Seljuq of Rum Ghiyath al-Dīn Kay Khusraws II (r. 1237-1246) changed the colour from black to blue to mark his opposition against the Abbasids. Chingis Khān had a yellow and red parasol; red was that of the Ilkhans. Timūr (r. 1370-1405) is portrayed in a miniature entering Samarkand under a parasol (from a copy of Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī's *Zafarnāma*, Shiraz, 1434-36 ca., Washington D.C., Freer Gallery of Art, inv. no. 48.18, cf. Gray 1961, 97) of dark red brocade decorated with small, gold motifs. A Safavid parasol with arabesque brocade, sometimes a fringe, maybe a gilded bird on top, is depicted in painted outdoor scenes (for all these informations see Andrews 1993, 193). Nevertheless, the parasols portrayed in miniatures not always respect the historical colours.

According to Ibn al-Athīr (d. 1233), the Seljuq Sulaymān Shāh (the nephew of Malik Shāh, r. 1159-1160) entered Baghdad under a parasol to pay visit to the Abbasid caliph.³⁷ The same historian reports that the Ghurid ‘Alā’l-dīn Ḥusayn *Jahānsūz* (r. 1141-1169) adopted some of the royal features in use among the Ghaznavids and the Seljuqs, such as the title of *al-sultān al-mu‘azzam* and the ceremonial parasol (*chatr*).³⁸

Later on, the Ilkhanid Jalāl al-Dīn (r. 1412) surrounded the encampment of a rebellious relative, who recognised him as the Sultan thanks to the parasol held over his head.³⁹

During the Timurid and Safavid periods many miniatures illustrating scenes drawn from history and literature, related to the Iranian epic as to coeval events, were produced. Some of them show parasols provided with a bird-shaped finial.⁴⁰

3. THE ROYAL PARASOL AND ITS BIRD-SHAPED FINIAL IN ISLAMIC EGYPT

The use of the parasol is testified in Fatimid Egypt, but the presence of a bird-shaped finial on its top is attested only during the reign of the Fatimids’ successors. Moreover, while the use of the parasol in the Iranian Islamic lands is attested by both written sources and images, its tradition in the Islamic Mediterranean emerges merely by historical sources.

As well as under the Ghaznavids, at the Fatimids carrying the parasol corresponded to a high rank. In the 11th century, though Slavs became less prominent in the army they nevertheless continued to be the favoured ones for such task. The *ṣāhib al-miẓalla* occupied the fourth level in the administrative-military hierarchy after the vizier, the head chamberlain or *ṣāhib al-bāb*, and the commander-in-chief or *isfahsālār*.⁴¹

Gold seems to have been the favourite colour for parasols: in 990, al-‘Azīz (r. 975-996) rode to the Azhar Mosque under a *miẓalla mudhahhaba*,⁴² while the parasol used by al-Ẓāhir (r. 1021-1036) in 1024 had heavy gold fringes.⁴³

Numerous references relate the role of the parasol to the royal lineage. The amir ‘Abd Allāh, son of the caliph al-Mu‘izz (r. 953-975) returned to Cairo in 973-4 after the successful fight against the Qaramatians. He made his entrance shaded by a parasol (*miẓalla*), which was «ordinarily a caliphal prerogative». Al-Mu‘izz received him sitting under a dome (*qubba*) over the gate of the palace.⁴⁴ The amir is granted with a great honour as a recognition of his military merit; still the caliph stands higher than anyone else does.

³⁷ Richards 2016, 77-78.

³⁸ Bosworth 1965, 1100.

³⁹ Boyle 1968, 326.

⁴⁰ A bird finial appears on top of a closed parasol in a scene drawn from Nizāmī’s *Khamsa* portraying “Khusraw arriving at the palace of Shīrīn” in a manuscript from Baghdad, 1386-88, London, British Library, Ms. Or. 13297, fol. 80r (cf. Canby 1993, 43, fig. 23) and another one from Tabriz, 1410, Washington D.C., Freer Gallery of Art, inv. no. 31.36 (cf. Grube 1995, fig. 67). See also “The execution of Farāmurz in front of Bahman”, *Bahmannāma*, Shiraz (?), 1397, Ms. Or. 2780, fol. 163v, London, British Library, cf. Stchoukine 1954, pl. XV. From Rashīd al-Dīn’s *Jāmi‘ al-Tawārīkh*, Herat, 1430, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Supplément persan 1113, fols. 177r and 217v (cf. BnF website). For a bird-shaped finial on a canopy see from the same manuscript “The funeral of Ghāzān”, fol. 245v (cf. BnF website).

⁴¹ Bosworth 1995, 879.

⁴² Sanders 1994, 48.

⁴³ Sanders 1994, 26.

⁴⁴ Sanders 1994, 22.

The *qubba* - a fixed structure located in an upper position - answers to the *mizalla* granted to his son, so that the hierarchic order is maintained through its visible symbols.

Moreover, when al-Mu‘izz died the event was only revealed as his successor al-‘Azīz rode in procession to the mosque for the *‘id al-nahr* under the parasol and then pronounced the *khutba* in his own name: thus, the parasol was such strong a symbol to equalise the Friday sermon, traditionally considered the way through which the ruler demonstrates his power along with the coinage (*sikka*).⁴⁵

Another episode attests that the parasol was carried over al-‘Azīz’s heir apparent Maṣūūr during the Ramaḍān procession in 993. On that occasion, even the caliph rode without its shade: the impression made on the public must have been great, the caliph renounced to his own insignia in favour of his successor, so to show him officially as the next ruler.⁴⁶

A further interesting aspect emerges from the sources: the parasol was only employed in outdoor settings during processions for festivities and celebrations and it was never carried within the palace walls.⁴⁷ By the analysis of the sources, the same can be said for the Ghaznavids; and after all, this was the custom in the Antiquity.⁴⁸ According to Sanders, this choice in the Fatimid context can be explained by the identification of the parasol with the palace itself.⁴⁹ The parasol thus becomes a sort of synopsis of the royal palace that can follow the king when he is outdoor. The relation between the *qubba* and the parasol highlighted in the episode about the caliph al-Mu‘izz⁵⁰ is revealing: the two highest ranks in the reign are marked by two elements (*qubba* and parasol) that become interchangeable.

Most references to the Fatimid court concern official ceremonies of various kind, and in particular those linked to the Nile occurring twice a year: perfuming the Nilometer and cutting the canal when the Nile reached sixteen cubits. The latter occurred in 1122: «the caliph emerged from the Gold Gate [...] The parasol was unfurled and the caliph [al-Āmir] began the procession while the Qur’an was being recited».⁵¹

Ibn al-Ṭuwayr (d. 1220) describes the preparation that preceded the celebration of the New Year.⁵² The royal insignia were usually kept in the palace treasuries under the responsibility of high officials; the parasol was selected together with the caliph’s outfit so that the elements match one another.⁵³ «After the caliph mounted his horse [...] the three

⁴⁵ Sanders 1994, 25-26.

⁴⁶ Sanders 1994, 25-26.

⁴⁷ «The parasol had been opened to the caliph’s right as he exited from the Festival Gate» proceeding to the *muṣallā* (see Sanders 1994, 77).

⁴⁸ Assyrian, Achaemenid and Sasanian kings portrayed under a parasol invariably appear in outdoor scenes. See above and fn. 5, and cf. also below and fn. 61.

⁴⁹ Sanders 1994, 26.

⁵⁰ See above and fn. 44.

⁵¹ Sanders 1994, 108.

⁵² Ibn al-Ṭuwayr does not specify the caliph’s name. Taking into account his life’s extent, it should be one of the last four Fatimid caliphs: al-Ḥāfiẓ (r. 1130-1149), al-Zāfir (r. 1149-1154), al-Fā’iz (r. 1154-1160), or al-Āḍid (r. 1160-1171).

⁵³ In his list of the royal instruments («On Royal Instruments Especially for Grand Processions») al-Qalqashandī (d. 1418) confirms that the parasol (*mizalla*) always matched the fabric of the caliph’s costume (see Sanders 1994, 25, who nevertheless denounces that al-Qalqashandī’s list reflects Mamluk categories which appear anachronistic related to the Fatimids).

main insignia, the parasol, sword, and inkstand, were brought out and given to their porters. The porter unfurled the parasol with the assistance of four *Şaqlabī* eunuchs, and he placed it firmly in the stirrup of his horse, holding the pole with a bar over his head». ⁵⁴ This passage describes the high care devoted to the parasol and proves that it was as important as better-known insignia. To this respect, Sanders stresses: «all things associated with the caliph were accorded the same reverence as the caliph himself». ⁵⁵

The presence of a bird-shaped finial is attested only under the Ayyubids and Mamluks by al-Qalqashandī who includes the parasol in his chapter entitled «On the protocols and instruments of royalty»:

«called al-jitr, described as a yellow silk dome brocaded with gold that has a **gold-plated silver bird** at its apex. It is carried above the sultan's head during [the processions of] the two feasts. This item was carried over from the Fatimid era». ⁵⁶

He also reports that the Mamluk *dār al-tirāz* produced parasols topped by a bird-shaped jewel. The device, shaped on a Fatimid prototype, became known as *al-qubba wa 'l-tayr*, the dome and the bird. ⁵⁷

The custom spread southward: in his travel's report Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 1368-9) attests the persistence of the parasol in the African region during the mid-14th century as a reminiscence of the Fatimid protocol. ⁵⁸ He also stresses in further occasions the jewelled nature of the parasol. ⁵⁹

In 1514, according to Ibn Iyās, the Mamluk Sultan Qānsūh al-Ghūrī (r. 1501-1516) replaced the bird that had traditionally topped the *qubba* or royal parasol with a gold crescent, the symbol of Islam. ⁶⁰ The importance of this passage is twofold: first, it confirms that the term *qubba* was used to indicate the parasol as well; second, it provides us with the date until which the parasol's finial was still bird-shaped.

⁵⁴ Sanders 1994, 88-90.

⁵⁵ Sanders 1994, 88-90.

⁵⁶ El-Toudy - Abdelhamid eds. 2017, 239 (emphasis added). As already mentioned, to the state of our knowledge such a heritage from the Fatimids is not attested by written sources.

⁵⁷ Holt 1993, 192.

⁵⁸ He reports in particular about the sultan of Maqashaw (Mogadishu; see Gibb ed. 1959, 377). Ibn Baṭṭūṭa guided a Moroccan embassy to the empire of Mali and describes the local Sultan holding audience seating under «a parasol, that is to say, something like a silken cupola [...] On top of it is a gold bird the size of a falcon» (see Gibb - Beckingham eds. 1994, 959). In Morocco, where the orientalist painter Eugène Delacroix (d. 1863) portrayed the ruler under a royal parasol (see Dakhliā 2005, fig. 1), still in the early 1980s high state awards counted a gold star plaque (to be worn over the shoulder from right to left) bearing on the second side «the representation of the royal parasol, red in colour» (Pellat 1995, 62).

⁵⁹ Gibb ed. 1971, 651, 666, 712, 753, 760.

⁶⁰ Alhamzah 2009, 41, 132. A crescent, *hilāl-i rāyat*, was already in use on top of the Ghaznavid banner's pennon (see Khan 1949, 81-83; Bosworth 1977, 99).

4. THE BIRD-SHAPED FINIAL AND ITS MEANING

Numerous evidences, coming from cultural contexts earlier than the Islamic period, show parasols provided with a vegetal or geometric finial or without any finial. In the stone reliefs of Sargon II (r. 721-705 BCE) at Khorsabad the parasol is topped by a vegetal finial that can be identified with a lotus; in Persepolis' reliefs (in the Council Hall, the palaces of Darius and Xerxes, in Xerxes Haram) a fruit resembling a pomegranate probably with a good wishing role tops the parasol.⁶¹ It was a symbol of fertility by virtue of its thousand red 'seeds',⁶² thus largely represented in royal contexts.⁶³

The introduction of an ornithomorphic finial must have occurred in the Islamic period, but what led sovereigns to shift from a vegetal symbol to a zoomorphic one is still to be understood. Most reliable sources place the introduction of the bird-shaped finial under the Ghaznavids.⁶⁴ As far as we know, there is no coeval evidence from Egypt. References to this kind of finial date back to a later period when, according to the opinion of al-Qalqashandī, it was possibly adopted imitating a Fatimid prototype.⁶⁵

It is not easy to infer the bird species from miniatures, but whenever the historical sources are specific in this regard, a falcon is mentioned. Taming falcons for hunting was regarded among the divertissements worthy of a king, as attested also in the *Shāhnāma*;⁶⁶ but the symbolic meaning of such practise goes far beyond the pleasures of court. As written sources such as the *Avesta* (sacred Zoroastrian hymns) and the *Bundahishn* (the *Book of Primal Creation*, a Middle Persian encyclopaedic text) attest, in the Zoroastrian understanding of good and evil the falcon was a heavenly creation, entitled to hunt down and eliminate the evil creatures.⁶⁷ The task of the (Persian) king was pretty much the same, so that martial arts and hunting skills had a similar role among the king's occupations.⁶⁸ Moreover, since the falcon was associated with Verethraghna - the deity of offensive war and victory -⁶⁹ and *xwarrah* - the heavenly fortune and glory -,⁷⁰ it became strictly linked to the Persian ideology of kingship.⁷¹ Even after the fall of the Sasanians and the decline of Zoroastrianism, the falcon enjoyed the position of royal companion in the framework of hunting. The Persian poet and mathematician 'Umar Khayyām, in his *Nawrūznāma* (12th

⁶¹ See Botta - Flandin 1849-1850, II, pls. 63, 71, 107, and in particular 113; and Schmidt 1953, pls. 75, 76, 138, 139, 178-181, 194, respectively.

⁶² The finial could also be identified with the amalaka, a fruit employed as a finial on Hindu temples (see Rosser-Owen 1999, 28, fn. 2).

⁶³ On the pomegranate in the ancient Near East, see Nigro - Spagnoli 2018.

⁶⁴ The Turkish term *lachin* for falcon was also adopted as a personal name, according to the Turkic custom. Bosworth (1977, 61) mentions the amir 'Aḏūd al-Dīn Lāchīn Khāzin as the addressee of a poem by 'Uthmān Mukhtārī.

⁶⁵ Cf. above and fn. 56.

⁶⁶ Daryae - Malekzadeh 2018, 251.

⁶⁷ Daryae - Malekzadeh 2018, 245.

⁶⁸ Daryae - Malekzadeh 2018, 247, 252.

⁶⁹ One of Verethraghna's avatars is a falcon, which possibly became a symbol of good luck on coins, crowns and seals (Daryae - Malekzadeh 2018, 246).

⁷⁰ The glory, *xwarrah*, is described flying to or away from kings as a falcon (Daryae - Malekzadeh 2018, 246-247).

⁷¹ The falcon connection with the Sasanian crown has already been pointed out (see above, fn. 14).

century), stresses the «nobility and immaculacy» of falcons.⁷² In the *Maṭīq al-ṭayr* (1177), a Persian mystical poem by Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, the falcon, fast and sharp-eyed, is described in an attitude full of dignity and conscious of its rank, since its distance from the common people entitles it to lay on the kings' shoulder.⁷³ In the same way, as a symbol of royal archetype, the falcon is represented in front of Solomon - the king of the beasts - to symbolise the victorious heavenly kingdom just as lions beside him represent the terrestrial government.⁷⁴ The term *ṣaqr*,⁷⁵ falcon, thus seems to be a universal symbol of victory, linked by Tamari to the concepts of *al-'izz* (the glory), *al-sultān* (the sultan), and *al-nāṣir* (the victorious).⁷⁶ «*Ṣaqr Quraysh*» is the nickname attributed to the Umayyad 'Abd al-Raḥmān I (r. 756-788) by his rival the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754-775).⁷⁷

The parasol finial is often referred to as a jewel, probably because of its shiny appearance, because it crowned a device already distinguished by prized fabrics, and maybe because of refined manufacture. It was likely made of metal, and in particular precious metals as suggested by al-Qalqashandī who writes of a «gold-plaited silver bird». ⁷⁸ Lastly, miniatures always show it as a golden finial. The presence of a pearl revealed by the Ghaznavid sources⁷⁹ opens the chance that the bird was embellished by the addition of precious stones or inlay. The Persian traveller Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. 1088) reports that during the Nile procession of al-Mustanṣir in 1047 the «parasol itself was covered with precious stones and pearls». ⁸⁰

Zoomorphic, often bird-shaped, finials are largely employed on Islamic metalwork especially on top of handles, lids and spouts, sometimes with an apotropaic role. Unfortunately, relating fragmentary preserved items to a specific artefact is all but easy. Furthermore, it is likely that once a parasol was damaged or deteriorated its finial was melt down.⁸¹ How the finials were fixed on top of the parasol can be tentatively inferred by observing the miniatures. Usually, the bird stands on a globular or spade-shaped pedestal. A couple of bronze artefacts might provide hypothetical examples similar to such finials. The first, ascribed to the 10th-century Iran, features a conical and flat-based pedestal;⁸² the second and far later one (17th-18th century) is inlaid with silver and presents a concave, sloping base possibly fitting a domed shape.⁸³

⁷² Daryaee - Malekzadeh 2018, 254.

⁷³ Saccone 1999, 35-36, 48.

⁷⁴ Tamari 1996, 99.

⁷⁵ According to Ibn Hishām al-Lakhmī (12th century), the term *ṣaqr* indicates any bird of prey employed in falconry, thus both eagles and falcons (see Martínez Enamorado 2011, 160-161).

⁷⁶ Tamari (1996, 31 and fn. 46) recalls the role embodied by the falcon and the eagle as well for the Umayyad dynasty, both in Damascus and Cordova.

⁷⁷ Tamari 1996, 113-114, fn. 68.

⁷⁸ See above and fn. 56.

⁷⁹ See above and fn. 13.

⁸⁰ Cf. fn. 59.

⁸¹ A pre-Islamic finial found at Gordion, approximately dated to the 8th century BCE and attributed to a parasol, was wooden made (see Simpson 2014).

⁸² The artefact is mentioned by Allan (1976, II, 834, no. 4) and Rosen-Ayalon (1972, 180, fig. 33), who published the picture.

⁸³ The item was auctioned: https://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/24665592_islamic-bronze-bird-finial-with-silver-inlay (last access: 19/06/2019).

5. CONTEXTS OF EMPLOY AND SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

The high number of miniatures and written sources including the parasol offer the chance to observe a wide range of situations and contexts this insignia was employed in. The parasol acted as a sign: it signalled the presence and position of the king on the field and distinguished his figure from the rest of his retinue, since the parasol was reserved to the king, not to his family members (with due exceptions).⁸⁴ Beyond celebrative and military occasions, sometimes the parasol appears in funerary contexts.⁸⁵

Miniatures show either historical kings or literary heroes shaded by the parasol, which always marks the prominent figure in the scene thus becoming an «expanded royal symbol» that embodies different values; such freedom of employ can be observed in late Islamic representations, while on ancient stone reliefs its role was much more restricted.⁸⁶

The role of the parasol as a royal insignia deserves further analyses; in fact, the landscape should be enlarged to include other elements typical of the royal ‘equipment’ and regarded to embody the seat of the government: the palace, the tent and the throne. The relationship between them and the parasol is closer than it could seem.

As already stated, in the Fatimid context «the parasol clearly symbolised the palace».⁸⁷ The expression *al-qubba wa l-tayr* names the parasol, by virtue of its domed shape, through the term usually adopted for domed structures covering throne halls and entrance gates in Islamic civil architecture. Unfortunately, royal palaces built by the Ayyubids and Mamluks in Cairo survive insufficiently; just few information are provided by the sources.⁸⁸ Still, it can be assumed that the parasol was intended as a portable *qubba* on behalf of the actual *qubba*, the royal palace. The link between parasol and *qubba* is observed in miniatures on an iconographic ground through the addition of the falcon above both of them. Some of these miniatures show sloping domes on top of buildings. It could be hypothesised that they were made of fabric, as tents covering a terrace.⁸⁹ In this case, the

⁸⁴ Cf. fns. 9 and 36.

⁸⁵ Parasols, like standards, were placed by the Seljuqs on the tomb of the deceased ruler as a mark of respect (see Andrews 1993, 193). Since the possession of the *chatr* corresponded to the possession of the throne, it accompanied the king even after his death. Ibn al-Athīr recounts about the succession of Berkyaruq (r. 1092-1105) that in 1104 the atabeg Ayaz brought back to Isfahan, along with the deceased sultan, «the *sarāpardas* (*surādiqāt*), tents (*khiyām*), royal parasol (*chatr*) and royal diadem (*shamsa*) and all that was required for a sultan and put it at the disposal of his son Malik-Shāh» (Durand-Guédy 2013, 168). Occasionally, the parasol was retaken to be used in the investiture of the successor ruler. It occurred in 1206, when a parasol was taken from a Ghurid tomb in Ghazni and carried to Firuzkuh (see Flood 2009, 122). See the parasol, topped by a bird-shaped finial, standing beside the dead Shīrīn in “The suicide of Shīrīn”, Nizāmī’s *Khamsa*, Tabriz, 1505, Keir Collection (on loan with the Dallas Museum of Art), Ms. K.1.2014.739, cf. Canby 1999, 30, fig. 18. For a bird-shaped finial on a canopy in a funerary scene, see fn. 40, *in fine*.

⁸⁶ Sims 1992, 78. A miniature of a mid-15th century *Shāhnāma* from Iran (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 20.120.242, cf. MET website) displays Gav and Talḥand appearing inside canopies mounted on elephants and shadowed by domed-shaped parasols. The latter obviously serve no function, since the canopies have their own covers, if not marking the personages on the field.

⁸⁷ Sanders 1994, 94. See above and fn. 44.

⁸⁸ O’Kane 2017, 587.

⁸⁹ See Firdowsī’s *Shāhnāma*, Iran, 1446, London, British Library, Ms. Or 12688, fols. 130v (cf. Titley 1977, pl. 20), and 28v, 135r, 150v (BL website - images online); and a copy of Rashīd al-Dīn’s *Jāmi’ al-Tawārikh*, Herat, 1430 ca., Bibliothèque nationale de France, Supplément persan 1113, fols. 28v, 130v, 135r and 150v (BnF website).

link with the parasol would be even closer. A fabric-made tent would have covered the personage appearing inside a building as the parasol covers him outdoor. The falcon represents the *trait d'union* between the two devices.

A Safavid miniature consents to observe a morphological evolution: the parasol (without the bird-shaped finial) on a step forward toward the shape of an architectonic *qubba* according to the shape in use under the Safavids (fig. 5).⁹⁰

The term *qubba* could be used to indicate a dome-shaped tent as well.⁹¹ Thus, another conceptual link between royal devices is established. The tent is the absolute portable structure but also the closest one to the role of the royal palace, being the king residence and his audience hall. Some Muslim sultans are known to have preferred spending much of their time in nomadic tents. Seljuqs, for instance, were not sedentary rulers; even the long-reigning Malik Shāh (r. 1072-1092), along with his activity as a patron of new buildings, lived also in tents (*sarāparda*). This custom consented to move from one place to another according to the change of seasons and to keep close relations with the army at any time, thus ensuring the power, and with the Turkmens as well. The value of the royal tent as the official seat of power was fully acknowledged. In the Seljuq court, the parasol is often associated to the tent - sometimes referred to as the red *qubba* - as a symbol of kingship.⁹²

A further link between royal symbols concerns the parasol and the throne. The number of miniatures showing a falcon on top of the throne is revealing; some of them include it on both the throne and the parasol as the already mentioned miniature portraying the Ghaznavid Maḥmūd (fig. 1). Probably more numerous are the miniatures illustrating only the throne topped by a bird finial: among these it can be mentioned one from a Timurid manuscript of Rashīd al-Dīn's *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* (Herat, 1430) showing the throne of the Mongol Chingis Khān surmounted by a falcon, thus attesting the persistence of the custom during the Timurid period (fig. 4).⁹³

Finally, Maḥmūd al-Kāshgharī in his famous *Dīwān lughāt al-turk* (1072) provides the Khāqāni term for the parasol, *chowāch*, which interestingly denotes the crown - or the vault of heaven - as well.⁹⁴ The domed shape - of either the *qubba* or parasol - ideally crowns the

⁹⁰ Fig. 5 shows “Anūshīrvān and Buzurgmīhr”, Nizāmī's *Khamsa*, Khurasan, 1575, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 14.594.

⁹¹ Durand-Guédy 2013, 170-171.

⁹² For all these informations, see Durand-Guédy 2013, 172-180, 183.

⁹³ “The proclamation of Chingis Khān”, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Supplément persan 1113, fol. 44v, cf. Blochet 1929, pl. LX. For miniatures illustrating the throne with a bird finial, see Firdowsī's *Shāhnāma*, Iran, 1446, London, British Library, Ms. Or 12688, fols. 22r (Brend - Melville eds. 2010, ill. 4), 186r (Meri ed. 2006, front cover ill.), 19r, 37r, 45v, 84v and 197v (cf. BL website - images online); *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh*, Herat, 1430 ca., BnF, Supplément persan 1113, fols. 91r, 114v, 204 v (BnF website); “Giv brings Gurgin before Kay Khusrau”, Firdowsī's *Shāhnāma*, Iran, 1493-4, Washington DC, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, inv. no. S1986.160, cf. Canby 1999, fig. 4. A bronze beaker (Iran, dated to the early 1st millennium BCE) shows a throne featuring an upward pointing protome in form of bird head (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 54.5; cf. Muscarella 1974, fig. 4). From the Elymaean complex in Tang-i Sarvak (eastern Khuzistan province, 1st-3rd centuries) comes a relief showing a bird-shaped footed throne (see von Gall 1971, fig. 1). These ancient prototypes may have influenced the choice of a bird-shaped finial during the Islamic period.

⁹⁴ Andrews 1993, 193.

king and reproduces the vault of heaven over his head.⁹⁵ When such a device is carried above the king the latter is marked as an *axis mundi* between the Earth and the Sky, paralleling the order granted by the ruler to the cosmic one established by God.

6. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

The fact that no reference to the use of the parasol in the Islamic context predates the Abbasid period might possibly indicate that such a device entered the Islamic royal protocol along with the introduction of Persian customs, given its ancient origin.

As demonstrated above, the parasol was a royal insignia: great attention was paid to the choice of its fabric, often a precious silk, its colour and decorative pattern, usually matching the caliph's robe. Nothing was left to chance in the Islamic royal protocol, and highly scenographic processions were common especially under the Fatimids.

The addition of a bird-shaped finial on top of the parasol helped enhancing its meaning and it must have been chosen carefully so to convey the right message. The falcon, whose first introduction can be historically retraced to the Ghaznavid period, enjoyed a royal connotation among the birds of prey. The varied contexts of employ indicate it as a flexible and inclusive symbol, proper to convey authority of the king as well as the role of the main character in the story. Evidence in Egypt point to the Mamluk period; still al-Qalqashandī believed that the *al-qubba wa 'l-ṭayr* was a Fatimid heritage.⁹⁶

The inclusion of the bird-shaped finial in so many miniatures attests its communicating strength and its historical persistence through centuries as a trace of the influence exerted by early Islamic rulers on the following dynasties. Miniatures' painters clearly drew from an iconographic repertoire that necessarily reflected the common awareness.

Since its employ in the crown that rested on the Sasanian kings' head, the bird of prey alluded to the concepts of glory and victory. The falcon added on top of the Islamic parasol retained the same meaning, being perceived as a mark of royalty enriching the insignia on a decorative as well as symbolic ground.⁹⁷ The expression «in the service of the parasol (*chatr*) of the imperial stirrup», attested under the Seljuqs, equalises the parasol to kingship itself.⁹⁸ It demonstrates the physical transfer of authority and representativeness from the ruler to one of his insignia.⁹⁹ In Flood's words, «as signs of sovereignty, inalienable objects often refer metonymically or synecdochically to the body politic [...] by the very act of possessing such sign, their possessor becomes what they embody».¹⁰⁰

To conclude, a modern stone relief in Chashma 'Alī, near Rayy, where the Qajar Fath 'Alī Shāh (r. 1797-1834) appears in two scenes can be mentioned. In the first one, he is seated on his throne; in the second scene, on the right, he stands with a falcon on his

⁹⁵ See Lehman 1945 (cf. Mathews 1982); Soper 1947; Smith 1950, in particular 81-83.

⁹⁶ See above and fn. 56.

⁹⁷ The Egyptian god Horus, who embodied the royal patron god, was also portrayed as a falcon (see Daryaei - Malekzadeh 2018, 246).

⁹⁸ Deny 1995, 529.

⁹⁹ A similar phenomenon occurred during the aniconic period with regard to Buddha; see above fn. 3.

¹⁰⁰ Flood 2009, 122.

forearm while an attendant holds a parasol behind him (fig. 6).¹⁰¹ The falcon, which used to top the parasol in earlier Islamic representations, comes back to its original function of hunter and its original position on the arm of the king. The intention of the two scenes seems to portray the king in his official duty and then in a more informal situation; still in the latter the parasol and the falcon are present, even if not together as in the traditional iconography analysed above.

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¹⁰¹ The relief's photo by the photographer Antoin Sevruguin (d. 1933), glass negative numbered FSA A.4 2.12 GN.00.11, is available in Myron Bement Smith Collection, ca. 1910-1970 (Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.). <https://learninglab.si.edu/resources/view/177753#>. See Luft 2001, 32-33.

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Fig. 2 - "Firdowsī meets the Ghaznavid court's poets 'Unsurī, Farrukhī and 'Asjudī", Firdowsī's *Shāhnāma*, Iran, 1535, Toronto, Aga Khan Museum, Ms. AKM 156 (ex M185), fol. 7r (after Bahari 1996, fig. 117).



Fig. 3 - “Sultan Sanjar and the old woman”, Nizāmī’s *Khamsa*, Herat, 1494-95, London, The British Library, Ms. Or. 6810, fol. 16r (after Bahari 1996, fig. 72, detail).

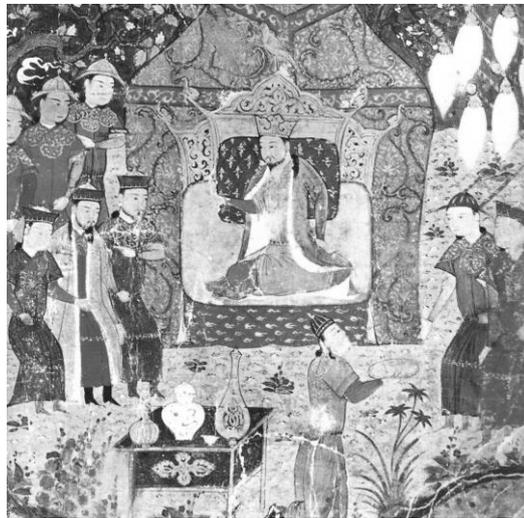


Fig. 4 - “The proclamation of Chingis Khān”, Rashīd al-Dīn’s *Jāmi‘ al-Tawārīkh*, Herat, 1430, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Supplément persan 1113, fol. 44v, detail (after Blochet 1929, pl. LX).

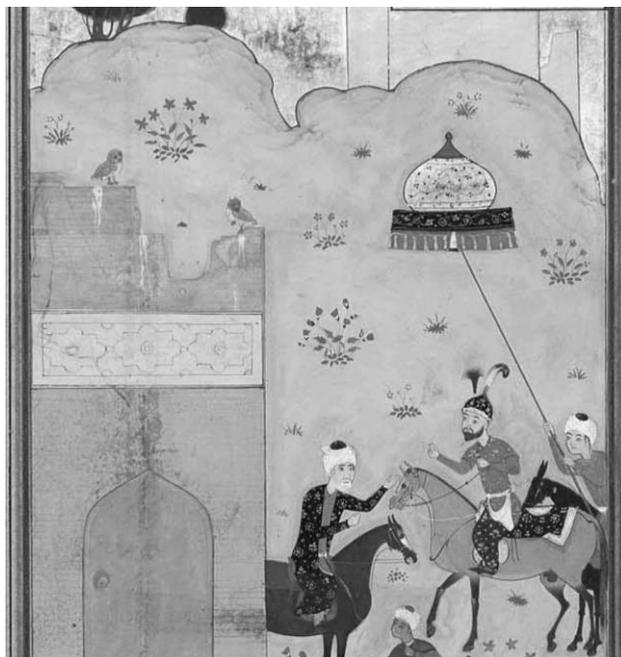


Fig. 5 - “Anūshīrvān and Buzurgmihr”, Nizāmī’s *Khamsa*, Khurasan, 1575, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 14.594 (after Coomaraswamy 1929, pl. XL:70, detail).

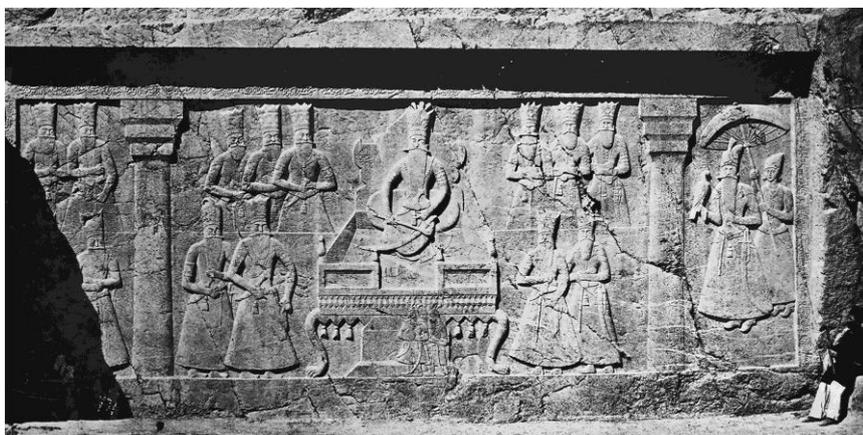


Fig. 6 - Stone relief in Chashma ‘Alī, near Rayy, showing the Qajar Fath ‘Alī Shāh (r. 1797-1834), photo FSA A.4 2.12 GN.00.11, M.B. Smith Collection, ca. 1910-1970 (Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.) <https://learninglab.si.edu/resources/view/177753#>.