

ДЕКОРАТИВНЕ МИСТЕЦТВО

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On some religious aspects of East Iranian figurative mace/scepter heads of Kushan era

A certain group of Iranian maces with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic heads is considered. Decorating of objects in the context of Iranian beliefs, affected by Hellenistic ideas during the Pre-Sasanian period in Iran is characterized. Particular attention is paid to bird headed scepter / mace that personify the semantics of authority and religion being an important part of the regalia.

Keywords: heads, maces, Hellenistic ideas, Pre-Sasanian period, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, Kushan state

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Про деякі релігійні аспекти Східних іранських метафоричних навершь булав/скіпетрів Кушанського періоду

Розглядається певна група іранських булав з антропоморфними та зооморфними навершьями. Характеризується оздоблення об'єктів у контексті іранських вірувань, що зазнали впливу елліністичних ідей протягом досасанідського періоду. Особлива увага приділяється скіпетрам/булавам з навершьям птахів, що уособлюють семантиці влади та релігії, будучи важливою частиною регалій.

Ключові слова: навершья, булави, елліністичні ідеї, досасанідський період, антропоморфний та зооморфний, Кушанська держава

The maces with the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic heads were known in the Achaemenid period and occasionally appeared in Assyrian art¹ in the forms of the demon Pazuzu (with an example of the mace found on Greek island of Samos)². However surprisingly, one may observe a relative decline of such a form of regalia in the art of the Sasanian period. Among the discussed maces, in the context of development of the said type, an important role is played by the depictions coming from the art of the Kushans. They constitute a certain bridge between traditions of Pre-Sasanian and the finds of the Late Sasanian Iran³.

Various aspects of Hellenistic in Iran were studied by J. Cribb, R. Göbl, A. S. Melikan-Chirvani, M. J. Olbrycht, M. T. Allouche Le Page; Iranian beliefs in context: R. Foltz; Maces/Sceptres/Clubs: P. O. Harper, J. Doostkhah, H.-V. Herrman, I. L. Izmajlov, U. Jantzen, M. M. Khorasani, A. L. Kubik, P. R. S. Moorey, M. M. Spagnoli; Kushan: R. Bracey, J. Cribb, R. Göbl, A. Maricq, S. Meenakshi; Kushan Archaeology: K. Abdulaev, L. Stančo, Pugachenkova, Z. V. Rtveladze; Gupta: R. Balasubramanian, N. Mahajan, E. M. Raven, P. Tandon.

The analysis embraced Iranian maces with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic heads from the Sasanian to the Safavid periods⁴. The objects of this type have a very special place in the beliefs, visual culture and the traditions of Iran⁵. The article tackled the problem of the development of the said maces with special emphasis on the iconographic transformations and mutual influences between literature (oral or written), artworks and archaeological finds. The subject is a complex one and practically any evolutionary change within the described group requires detailed discussion.

As was correctly pointed out by M. M. Spagnoli there is no way to avoid associating clubs and maces from the Kushan art with the Hellenistic portrayals of Heracles⁶. The subject of great popularity of the motif of Heracles in the period after the conquest of Alexander the Great has been already discussed numerous times. It reflected not only direct transition and visualization of the personage but his attributes as well⁷. It is clearly observable on an example of one of the greatest heroic personages of Iranian imagery – Rostam⁸.

Similarly the motifs borrowed from the Hellenistic culture can be noticed in the numismatics of the Kushan state. Direct transfers of Indo-Greek formulae is clearly visible in the coinage of Vima Kadphises⁹, minted most likely under direct influence of the coins of the Euthydemids. As rightly pointed out by M. M. Spagnoli the vast majority of the Kushan coins contain a kind of association with Heracleian iconography. It is difficult to state whether this is a direct reference to the very person of Heracles or, alternatively, the local rulers of post-Alexandrian era were referring to the attributes of Zeus and Heracles claiming their own descendancy from the Heraclids¹⁰.

One of the most intriguing group of the Kushan iconography are the depictions of the bird headed maces/scepters. They are most commonly found on the depictions of Huvishka¹¹. They are more seldom in the form of the long scepters which in turn gain popularity in the art of the Gupta dynasty India. Among the Kushan illustration we may clearly find two types. The first one shows the bird with a U-shaped body, with a short tail raised upwards. The second type shows the bird with a narrow tail turned downwards. The very convention of showing the bird above a protracted right hand (as on the depiction of Huvishka) is most likely of the Hellenistic origin. A coin published by R. Bracey is also extremely important here¹². It shows the bird of prey above stretched right hand of Yama (Iamsho) whose left hand rests on the long scepter



Tab I. From the left:

1. Tetradrachm of Alexander the Great, showing Zeus, Syria, after: Zlotnik Y. *A Hoard of Alexander the Great from the Region of Syria // Israel Numismatic Research.* – 2010. – №5. – Plate 4. nr. 4.
2. Bactrian attic tetradrachm of Antialkidas, showing Zeus, after: Jakobsson J. *Relations between Indo-Greek Kings after Menander // Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society.* – 2070. – № 191. – Fig. 3.
3. Kushan coin of Huvisshka, showing Yama (Iamsho), after: Bracey R. *Bird Symbolism on the Coinage of the Kushana Kings // Journal of the Numismatic Society of India.* – 2009. – № 71. – Iamsho.
4. Kushan coin of Huvisshka, after: Bracey R. *Bird Symbolism on the Coinage of the Kushana Kings // Journal of the Numismatic Society of India.* – 2009. – №71. – *The stages of the die xii1, B1.*
5. Kushan coin of Huvisshka, showing Mahasena, after: Bracey R. *Bird Symbolism on the Coinage of the Kushana Kings // Journal of the Numismatic Society of India.* – 2009. – №71. – fig. from «the 'Other' Bird Standard» figures.
6. Gupta Coin of Candragupta III, after: Tandon P. *Horseman Coins of Candragupta III // The Numismatic Chronicle.* – 2013. – №173. – Fig. 1, a, crescent.

or a spear. It is clear that referring to the iconography of Zeus appears not only on the coins of Alexander the Great but also on the coinage of his Seleucid, Bactrian successors later adopted by Indo-Scythians¹³. It must be noted that on the Hellenistic depictions, except the eagle, the personage of Nike – the goddess of victory, appears above the hand of the father of the gods. It is hard to state if that would be the process of blending in of the similar symbolisms, but it must be mentioned here that it is possible to refer the bird of prey with the Iranian virtory god – Verethragna who was called in Bactrian Orlagno¹⁴. It is interesting to interpret the depictions of the U-shaped bird as a rooster¹⁵. It might represent the Iranian/Avestan cult of Sraosha leading the souls through the Cinavand bridge¹⁶. What seems interesting is that the silhouette of the rooster appears (not unlike another symbol known from the maces – namely the hand) on the finds of the Kushan luxury items which were initially incorrectly understood by the present author as bone maces/sceptres¹⁷.

It must be pointed out that the long scepters with the bird-shaped finials were absorbed into Gupta iconography, on so called Garuda standard¹⁸. However, they went a specific evolution – the bird of prey is shown frontally in Gupta iconography, and the scepter itself is shown beside the main personage and is not held by the man.

Despite the fact that zoomorphic maces or scepters did not enter the canon of Sasanian art., they survived until the post-Sasanian period in the eastern Iranian lands and in the shape of the short scepter (in the hand of Godnes) they re-appear on the 6-7th century ossuary from Uzbek site Kaška Darya¹⁹.

The maces or the scepters with bird shaped heads are, as was shown above, the borrowing from the Hellenistic culture adopted to the tradition of Iranian zoomorphic and anthropomorphic maces. It is hard to say whether or not these scepters were physically used as there are no clear archaeological finds known to the current Author of the bird-headed maces/scepters or whether or not they were just an iconographical motif. It is interesting to note that they disappear under the reign of the Sasanians and re-appear after their fall in the shape of the short scepters. Their post-Sasanian form cannot be directly associated with the long scepters of the Guptas. It may reflect a universal, commonly recognizable meaning of the bird headed maces/sceptres in Eastern Iran where it was revived after several centuries of absence in the short period between the fall of the Sasanians and the raise of the Islamic era.

¹ Moorey P. R. S. Catalogue of the ancient Persian Bronzes in the Ashmolean Museum. – Oxford, 1971. – P. 92; Muscarella O. W. Review of U. Jantzen *Ägyptische und orientalische Bronzen aus dem Heraion von Samos* // *American Journal of Archaeology*. – 1973. – №77. – P. 236; Herrman H.-V. Review of U. Jantzen *Ägyptische und orientalische Bronzen aus dem Heraion von Samos* // *Gnomon Kritische Zeitschrift Fur Die Gesamte Klassische Altertumswissenschaft*. – 1975. – №47. – P. 395; Muscarella O. W. *Bronze and Iron. Ancient Near Eastern Artifacts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. – New York, 1988. – P. 288–289; Gorelik M. V. *Oruzhie Drevnego Vostoka...* – P. 57–61; Khorasani M. M. *Arms and Armour from Iran...* – P. 251–261.

² Jantzen U. *Ägyptische und orientalische Bronzen aus dem Heraion von Samos*, Bonn, 1972. – P. 57.

³ Kubik A. L. About one group of Iranian maces in the context of the new find from Sivas Turkey an analysis from the Sasanian to the Safavid period // *Metamorphoses of History*. – 2014. – № 5. – P. 161–163.

⁴ Kubik A. L. About one group of Iranian maces... – P. 154–180.

⁵ Harper P. O. The Ox-headed Mace in Pre-Islamic Iran // *Acta Iranica*. – 1985. – №24. – P. 246; Gorelik M. V. *Oruzhie Drevnego Vostoka. IV tisyacheletiyе — IV vek do n. e.* – Moskva, 1993. – P. 57; Izmajlov I. L. *Vooruzhenie i voennoe delo naseleniya Volzhskoy Bulgarii X – nachala XIII vv.* – Kazan/Magadan, 1997. – P. 96; Doostkhah J. Gorz // *Encyclopædia Iranica*. Vol. 11. Fasc. 2. URL: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gorz> (originally published: December 15, 2002); Khorasani M. M. *Arms and Armour from Iran. The Bronze Age to the End of Qajar Period*. – Tübingen, 2006. – P. 251; Kubik A. L. About one group of Iranian maces... – P. 156.

⁶ Spagnoli M. M. The Symbolic Meaning of the Club in the Iconography of Kushana Kings // *East and West*. – 1967. – №17. 3/4 – P. 248–267; Spagnoli M. M. Some Further Observations on the Symbolic Meaning of the Club in the Statue of Kaniska // *East and West*. – 1970. – №20. 4. – P. 460–468.

- ⁷ Olbrycht M. J. Seleucydzki i kultura ich epoki. – in: Wolski J. Dzieje i upadek imperium Seleucydów. – Kraków, 1999. – P. 135–208; Olbrycht M. J. On Coin Portraits of Alexander the Great and His Iranian Regalia. Some Remarks Occasioned by the Book by F. Smith: L'immagine di Alessandro il Grande sullemonete del regno (336–323) // *Zapiski Numizmatyczne*. – 2011. – №4. – P. 24.
- ⁸ Melikan-Chirvani A. S. Rostam and Herakles, a Family Resemblance // *Bulletin of the Asia Institut*. – 1998. – №12. – P. 171–199.
- ⁹ Spagnoli M. M. The Symbolic Meaning of the Club... – P. 460; Bracey R. The Coinage of Wima Kadphises // *Gandharan Studies*. – 2009. – №3. – P. 25–75.
- ¹⁰ Allouche Le Page M. T. L'art monétaire des royaumes grecs-bactriens. – Paris, 1956. – P. 26–28; Spagnoli M. M. The Symbolic Meaning of the Club... – P. 258.
- ¹¹ Göbl R. System und Chronologie der Münzprägung des Kusanreiches. – Wien 1984. – dies vi1, ix2, xvi, ix1, xxiii1.
- ¹² Bracey R. Bird symbolism on the coinage of the Kushana kings // *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*. – 2009. – №71. – P. 40.
- ¹³ Göbl R. Die Numismatik als Quelle zur Kunst der Sasaniden, der Kushan und der iranischen Hunnen // *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*. – 1987. – №1. – P. 65–79; Cribb J. The Greek Kingdom of Bactria, its Coinage and its Collapse. in: – *Afghanistan ancien carrefour entre l'est et l'ouest*. – ed. O. Boppearachchi. – Brepols, 2005. – P. 207–225; Cribb J. Money as a Marker of Cultural Continuity and Change in Central Asia. – in: – *After Alexander: Central Asia before Islam*. – ed. J. Cribb, G. Herrman. – Oxford, 2007, – P. 333–375. As was rightly pointed by P. N. Skupniewicz in personal communication, they derive most likely from the monumental sculpture by Fidias.
- ¹⁴ Maricq A. La grande inscription de Kaniska et l'Étéo-Tokharien. L'ancienne langue de la Bactriane // *Journal Asiatique*. – 1958. – №246. – P. 426.
- ¹⁵ Meenakshi S. Kukkutadhvaja on the Gold Coins of Huvishka // *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*. 2006. – №68. – P. 65–69.
- ¹⁶ Foltz R. Religions of Iran: From Prehistory to the Present. – London, 2013. – P. 28.
- ¹⁷ Pugachenkova G. A., Rtveldzhe Z. V. Dal' verzitepe Kushanskij gorod na jube Uzbekistana. – Tashkent, 1978. – P. 61, 111; Abdulaev K., Stančo L. Jandavlattepa. The Excavations Report for Seasons 2002–2006. – Prague, 2011. – P. 140; Stančo L. Současná Archeologie Severní Baktrie // *AVRIGA. Zprávy klasických filologů*. – 2005. – №47. – P. 54–64; Kubik A. L. About one group of Iranian maces... – P. 163.
- ¹⁸ Raven E. M. Gupta Gold Coins with the Garuda-Banner: Samudragupta-Skandagupta. Gonda Indological Studies Vol. I and II, Groningen, 1994; Balasubramanian R., Mahajan N. Some metallurgical aspects of Gupta period gold coin manufacturing technology // *Indian Journal of History of Science*. – 2003. – №38.4. – P. 331–349; Tandon P. Horseman Coins of Candragupta III // *The Numismatic Chronicle*. – 2013. – №173. – P. 171, 174.
- ¹⁹ Kubik A. L. About one group of Iranian maces... – P. 163.