

The Last Image of the Last King: A Sasanian Scene from the Bāzeh Hūr Fire Temple

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Gli scavi archeologici presso il tempio del fuoco di Bāzeh Hūr hanno recentemente portato alla scoperta di un pannello in stucco realizzato nel tardo periodo sasanide, che rappresenta iconograficamente una fusione delle tradizioni mesopotamiche, iraniche e transoxiane sia nella forma che nello stile. Esso è installato nella sala d'ingresso del tempio del fuoco, e la parte inferiore conservata mostra i piedi di quattro personaggi, uno dei quali è seduto davanti agli altri tre in piedi. Talune testimonianze archeologiche, così come la storia del nord-est dell'Iran in concomitanza con la conquista musulmana, ci portano a supporre che l'ultimo sovrano sasanide, Yazdegerd III, si sia rifugiato e abbia trascorso i suoi ultimi giorni in questo tempio reale del fuoco, e che il pannello sia stato creato durante il suo soggiorno in questo tempio.

Archaeological excavations at the Bāzeh Hūr Fire Temple have recently led to the discovery of a stucco panel that was created in the late Sasanian period, iconographically representing a fusion of Mesopotamian, Iranian and Transoxiana traditions in form and style. This decorative panel, located in the entrance room of the fire temple, preserves only its lower section, which depicts the feet of four figures: a seated individual facing three standing figures. Certain archaeological findings, together with the historical context of northeastern Iran at the time of the Muslim conquest, raise the possibility that Yazdegerd III, the last Sasanian king, sought refuge in this royal fire temple and spent his final days there. The panel may have been produced during his residence.

Introduction

Thanks to four seasons of excavations at the Bāzeh Hūr Fire Temple in 2018, 2020, 2022 and 2023, an elaborate collection has been found of more than 3,000 stucco fragments bearing figurative, faunal, floral and geometric motifs. Except for a stucco panel installed in the original place, the stuccoes at Bāzeh Hūr were obtained from the debris and disturbed layers that had filled the interior space of the rooms. An analysis of the iconography and style of these stuccoes suggests that they date to the second half of the Sasanian period and were created according to regional traditions in imagery and production methods (LabbaF-Khaniki 2021). The stucco fragments found at the Bāzeh Hūr Fire Temple closely resemble those from the Bandiān complex, which depict scenes of hunting, cavalry combat, religious ceremonies and royal banquets (Rahbar 1998: 219-222). The *in situ* stuccoes at Bandiān, of which only the lower portions of the panels survived, were considered the only primary reference for identifying Sasanian stuccoes in northeastern Iran, until the discovery of the *in situ* panel at Bāzeh Hūr.