


# The Bullas of Tal-i Gerdooha, Eqlid County in Fars, Iran

Hamed Molaei Kordshouli<sup>1</sup>  & Alireza Jafarizand<sup>2</sup>


## Abstract

Bullas are usually a bit of inscribed clay in different shapes and sizes that were made to stamp out goods. They were applied at a time when bullas were still soft and wet so that the owners of the goods could stamp them depending on their necessity and importance. Sealing imprints could be seen on bullas, with each bearing images, symbols, and inscriptions indicating or in possession of someone authorized to stamp on respective products. The discovery of these cultural materials during archaeological surveys brought to the fore the economic, cultural, religious, and political activities of the region in ancient times. Further study and research in this field can respond to many ambiguities and historical questions. The current paper is based on field surveys and library materials and aims to introduce, study, and compare Tal-i Gerdooha clay bullas discovered in Eqlid County. Based on images and inscriptions, bullas scrolls were divided into two groups and potentially belonged to the Sasanian period.

**Keywords:** Bulla; Tal-i Gerdooha; Eqlid County; Sasanian.



<sup>1</sup> MA in Archaeology, Fars, Iran.  [hamed\\_mowlaiey@yahoo.com](mailto:hamed_mowlaiey@yahoo.com) (Corresponding Author).

<sup>2</sup> Ph.D in Archaeology, Isfahan, Iran.  [Alirezajafarizand@yahoo.com](mailto:Alirezajafarizand@yahoo.com)

**Article info:** Received: 5 August 2023 | Accepted: 15 September 2023 | Published: 1 October 2023

**Citation:** Molaei Kordshouli, Hamed; Jafarizand, Alireza. (2023). "The Bullas of Tal-i Gerdooha, Eqlid County in Fars, Iran, *Ancient Iranian Studies*, Vol. 2 (7): 43-51.

<https://doi.org/10.22034/AIS.2023.414978.1048>

## Introduction

The Sasanian era is one of the important periods of Iranian history. In this era, rock-reliefs, bas-reliefs, stuccos, textiles, and coins, were valuable and stunning objects (see Rostami & Aryamanesh, 2020; Panjehbashi & Mohazzab Torabi, 2022; Roustaei Farsi, *et al*, 2022; Maksymiuk, 2021; Skupniewicz, 2022; Khanmoradi, *et al*, 2023; Rahbar, 2023). Also, Bullas are important objects in this period and some research has been published about them. Bullas are seals made of clay that were used to imprint on goods and letters (Akbarzadeh & Daryaei, 2012: 1).

These artifacts have particular importance for understanding economic, religious, political, and governing aspects as designs, signs, and inscriptions on seals trace shed light on these activities. Seals were often in the possession of officials during the Sasanian era, but they were not mentioned as the owners of the seal. Sasanian seals, especially in terms of having a specific name and place are very important. Some of them were carved with the name as well as advice (Amoozgar & Tafazzoli, 2003: 26). During an archaeological survey at Tal-i Gerdooha located in the Eqlid, a number of bullas were obtained. Eqlid, one of the cities of Fars province is located at 52° 42' 36.00" E Longitude and 30° 53' 55" N Latitude at an altitude of 2214 meters above sea level. Eqlid is at a distance of 270 kilometers from Shiraz (Research Foundation for Iranian Studies, 2000: Vol. 1: 405).

The Tal-i Gerdooha site is located in the hunting Basiran areas of Nokhodzar. There are apricot and walnut trees in this area, and that's why the hill is called Tal-i Gerdooha (walnuts) or Tal-i Gouri.

Archaeological and historical studies in Eqlid city, have not been done extensively. Only a brief report on the city following a visit by Madame Jane Dieulafoy is mentioned. Inscription Hoz-e Dokhtar-e Gabr in Eqlid was discovered in 1955 and the Tang-e Boraq inscription was recorded in 1956 and then reported by a staff of the Board of Persepolis the following year.

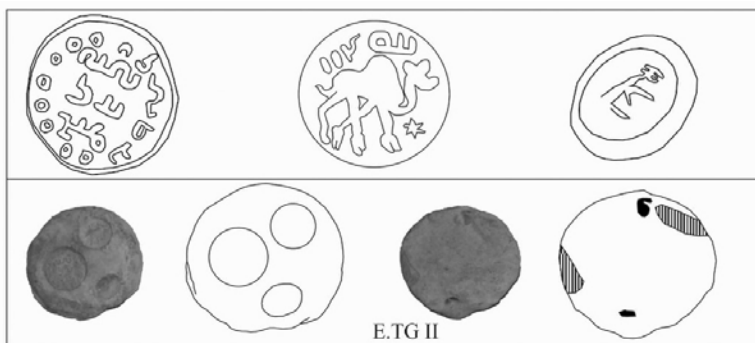
The survey and identification of Tal-i Gerdooha, for the first time, was carried out by the author with the authorization of the ICAR in May 2004. This site is severely degraded due to unauthorized digging; therefore, it is necessary to do a systematic survey of Tal-i Gerdooha which was performed on the pottery from this site with typology and classification of data and their relationship to other historical sites in Fars.

## Bulla with Inscription

Many seals that remained from the Sasanian period, apart from various forms, have inscriptions as well. Some of them are found with the Pahlavi inscription, but most have broken line sides (Amoozgar & Tafazzoli, 2003: 62). Inscriptions and coins of the early Sasanian era (Third and fourth centuries AD) have 19 letters. Since the letters are not connected to each other, they are called discontinuous lines or Pahlavi inscription lines. Plugged or broken line or lines for the book were written on skin and papyrus scrolls and later on coins (Amoozgar & Tafazzoli, 2003: 45).

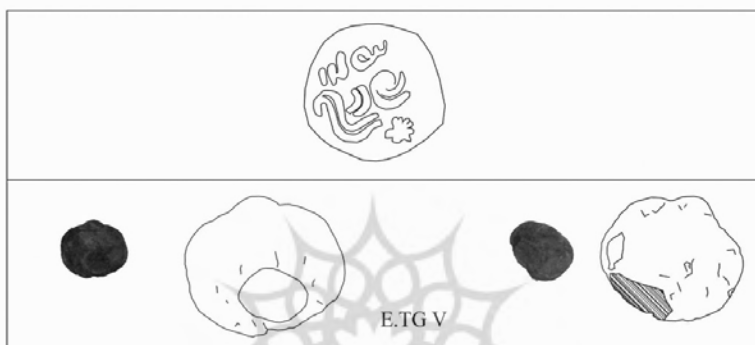
## Bulla E.TG II

Made of baked clay and of good quality, this bulla has an irregular circle with



E.TG II

Fig. 1



E.TG V

Fig. 2



E.TG VI

Fig. 3

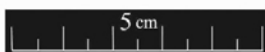


Table 1.

a cream color and is 4.5 cm in diameter and 1.5 to 2 cm in thickness. It has two holes for passing the thread. On the third bulla, imprints of seals can be seen from the Sasanian era (Fig. 1). These effects of seals have the following designs:

A: The seal effect is almost circular with a diameter of 1.6 cm and a depth of 2 mm. Two inscriptions can be seen on the seal effect: one of the scrolls in the middle and the other around the seal. Along the common pearl, its decoration is coarse. The inscrip-

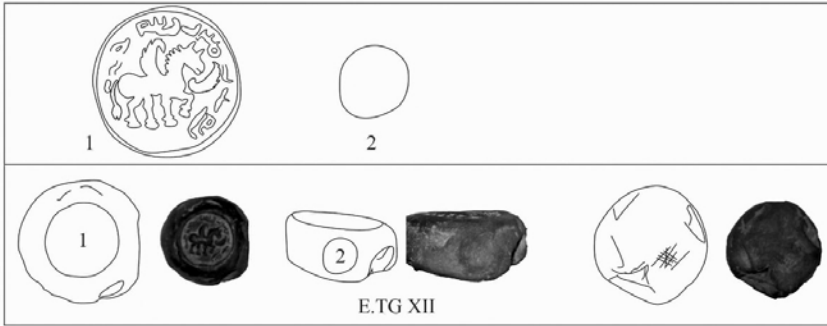


Fig. 4

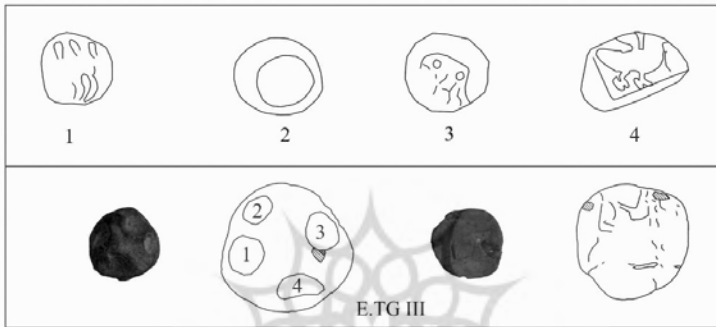


Fig. 5

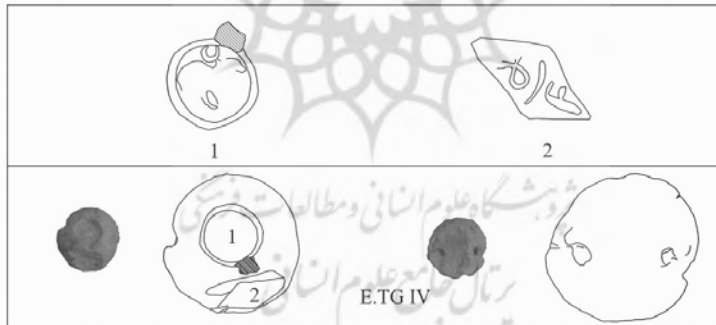


Fig. 6



Table 2.

tion in the middle of this bulla consists of two words formed from the bottom and vertically connected with the Phoenician script or script written in the Sasanian era.

The title text (Magu of Hazar) and an inscription around the seal are covered with broken lines and the (Istakhr) is

mentioned. Seals show state officials and their surroundings (Daryaee, 2004: 50).

Istakhr City was an administrative and religious center of the Achaemenid period. However, it is more difficult to determine the status of Sasanian Istakhr (Gyselen, 1989: 59).

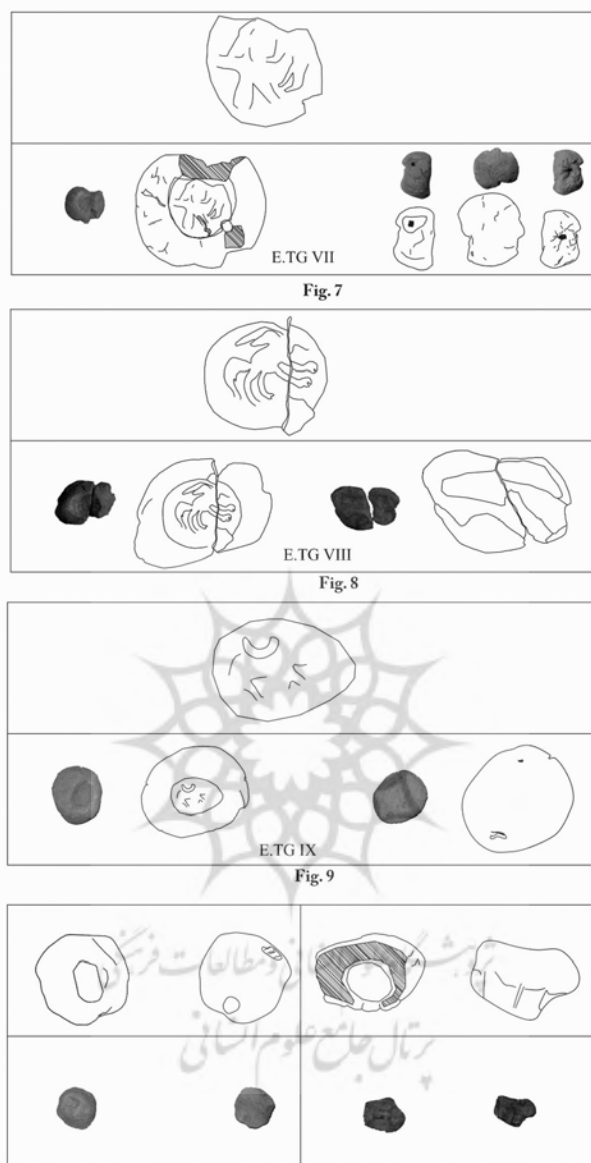


Table 3.

Magus with the lowest ranks of the clergy could do various religious tasks in towns, villages, and temples. It seems that he was the head of the monitoring of economic transactions (Daryaee, 2004: 52). The names of the Istakhr and Hazar both have come on a seal; thus, we can conclude that among Ha-

zar in the cities of Istakhr and Magus were in charge of collecting taxes and revenues.

At center: hc'l mgw(h)/ Hazar magu(h)

Magus of Hazar

At margin: sthly/ Staxrī

Istakhr

1 Translated by Cyrus NasrollahZadeh

**B:** The effect seal is circular with the camel walking from left to right and the front part of the camel is an irregular six-blade with the top of the head to the end of the body seen in inscriptions consisting of five characters from the right to left in the Pahlavi script. The text of the inscription has a theme PAWN (Abzwn = Afzwn (Increasing)), respectively. The diameter of the seal is measured at 1.2 cm and 2 mm thick. This effect is comparable with that of a camel image seal from the Qasr-I Abu Nasr (Frye, 1973: D.155 & D.286).

A complete innovation appears with Kavad I, who has only the name, and adds 'pzwn (increase) in his 12th year. This formula is retained until the end of the dynasty and only Khusrau II adds the ideogram GDH = xwarrah, splendour (Gobl, 2000: 330).

With the emergence of the word 'pzwn (Abzoun) during Kavad I on coins, and also due to the changes in the Sasanian-Pahlavi inscriptions on coins shown in the seal can also be seen during Kavad (632-651 AD). This bulla can be attributed to the fifth century AD and thereafter.

Sealing with camel: 'pzwn / afzun  
Increasing

In Iran, the role of camels appeared in the middle of the third millennium BC, on pottery in Tepe Sialk. A bronze ax was discovered in a grave in Gurab in south-eastern Iran (Jakubiak, 2011:109). The only representation of the most monumental art from the Sasanian period is the relief of Bahram II in Bishapur. The animal depicted on the Sasanian stamp and bullas is Jamaz Camel. Given that the east Iranian camel was a common and popular species, Iconography in this case cannot be random (Jakubiak, 2011: 109). Camel in the

Sasanian bullas meant as it was an image of Vərəθraγna. The message is that God has protected bulla doing all the characteristics associated with the camel, including, indirect perseverance and determination in him. Thus, owners of bulla with camel symbol, whether spiritual or royal officers, had Vərəθraγna features in granting and transferring and other qualities. The star figure on the crown of Sasanian kings is the symbol of Tištrya, one of the important and popular gods. The Sasanian kings praised and honored Tishtar with the symbol that she was the star (Dadvar & Makvandi, 2012: 29).

Tištrya (Pahl. Tištar, NPers. Teštar), an important Old Iranian astral divine being (yazata-), to whom the eighth hymn (*Tištar Yašt*) of the Later Avestan corpus was dedicated (Panaino, 1990).

**C:** This seal is small and oval. Its motif is not clear and after drawing, an unintelligible motif forms a diagonal line that appears above the three appendages. The effect seal was measured 1cm long, 8mm wide, and 5 mm thick.

#### Bulla No. V

This bulla is an irregular circular shape with a black color and has a diameter of 1cm and 2mm thick. It has two holes on its back to put it a string and sealing is visible whose imprint is similar to those of the Sasanian era. This seal is in a circular form with 7 cm in diameter and 3 mm deep (Fig. 2).

Sealing sign: 'Pzwn / afzun  
Increase

#### Bulla No. TG VI

This is also circular and irregular in shape

with dark brown, measuring 1.8 to 2 cm in diameter and 1cm thick. It has two holes for passing the thread. The seal effect is also in the shape of a circle with a diameter of 9cm and a depth of 3mm and probably shows a wolf or dog feeding little puppies. The hands of the animal are forward, the mouth open, and is in a roaring posture. Also, the animal has a big snout and big round eyes, and the ears are relatively small. The back of the animal and its cubs is unclear (Fig. 3). There is an incomplete inscription above the animals whose theme is the word Abzon (increase) prayer. Two examples of this type of seal obtained at Qasr-i Abu Nasr are comparable to this sample.

Sealing wolf or dog: \*p[zwn]

Afzun

Increase

#### **Bulla No. E.TG XII**

This bulla has a regular circular shape and is in dark red, on its surface is seen the burns. Its effect can be seen on the seal. The effect sealing is a winged horse with wings open and as is shown moving from left to right. On the top of the horse is a carved Sasanian Pahlavi inscription. In the part where the bulla's thickness is characterized, there is an effect of another seal that is in a small oval shape, with unclear roles. There are two holes for passing thread (Fig. 4).

Winged animals or real animals, are the frequent depiction of the seals, and are not identified what that means. These seals are a bit complicated and difficult because of the mysterious force that provokes imaginary engraving. The bird has three human figures and animals have a head along with four or five bodies (Grishman, 1991: 244). The inscription on

this bulla has three words that refer to the home of the Magi satrap.

Winged horse seal: BYTA Y MGW Y ŠT[R]PAN

xānag ī mow ī Satārpawn

The Magus House of Satrap

#### **Bullas without Inscription**

##### **Bulla No. TG III**

This bulla is an irregular circular shape made of clay and is in black color. It has a 3 cm diameter and 1.4 cm thickness. It has two holes to pass the thread. Its effect is seen on four seals but is uncertain except for one where a bird is shown flying to the right (Fig. 5). This bulla sample is similar to those obtained from Qasr-i Abu Nasr (Frye, 1973: D.22). Many bird species could be seen on the Sasanian engravings and were identified on several cases of Qasr-i Abu Nasr. There were impressions of ducks on the seals. In all cases, the bird is in proportion to the size of the original specification squat wavy or straight tail with one or two highly characterized (Frye, 1973: 77).

##### **Bulla No. TG IV**

This bulla has a regular circle and dark buff color with a diameter of 3.2 cm and a thickness of 9 mm. It has two holes for passing the thread and sealing. Two motifs can be seen on the stamp. One is a round-shaped seal and the other is a flat one. The motifs on the round stamp are unclear. It is 9 mm in diameter and has a depth of 1 to 2 mm (Fig. 6). The flat seal clearly shows three signs F (F), a crescent-shaped sign (J), and the sign of the ribbon (D). This seal is 1.1 cm long, 7



mm wide, and 4 mm deep. The f-shaped sign on this Bulla is incomprehensible. Many scholars such as Arthur Christensen, Hamza al-Isfahani, and Ackermann believe that the crescent had a special place in the Sasanian era and many kings used clothes, and royal thrones decorated with the crescent moon. The crescent appeared on the crest of the mid-fifth-century Sasanian crowns. Perhaps the crescent moon on the crest symbolized Anāhitā, a popular Zoroastrian Goddess (Dadvar & Mackvandi, 2012: 29). Considering the ribbon and its use in Sasanian Bulla, this Bulla may belong to a Sasanian nobleman.

#### **Bulla No. TG VII**

This Bulla was discovered from the square L3. This bulla is an irregular circular shape with dark buff color and has a diameter of 2 cm and a thickness of 1 cm. It has two holes for passing the thread and sealing. This sealing effect is round-shaped and is not entirely clear including, the role of the humanoid lion. The diameter of the seal is 8mm while its depth is 2mm (Fig. 7).

#### **Bulla No. TG VIII**

This bulla was also discovered from the square L3 and is an oval shape in dark brown and the size and thickness are 3.1 cm from 1 to 2.5 cm, respectively. The seal on it is round with a diameter of 1.1 cm and a thickness of 3 mm. It shows a Pegasus holding its two front legs up and moving to the right (Fig. 8) Animals such as elephants, deer, antelope, rabbits, pheasants, and ducks primarily can be considered aesthetic symbols visualizing physical quality (Brunner, 1978: 11).

#### **Bulla No. TG IX**

This bulla has a round shape and the color is dark brown. It was measured as 3 cm long and 2.5 cm thick. It has a sealing effect but remains unknown and only the moon and possibly an animal were specified in the plan (Fig. 9).

#### **Bulla No. TG X**

This bulla has an irregular circular shape and dark brown and is 2 cm long and 1.2 cm thick. The role of this Bulla is unclear (Fig. 10).

#### **Bulla No. TG XI**

Like Bulla No TG Xi, this is also pastoral in nature. This too has an irregular circular shape but is in black color. It was 2.2cm long and 1.7 cm wide with 1.2 cm thickness. Its role is also unclear and was found severely damaged condition (Fig. 11).

#### **Conclusion**

Bullas studied in the course of this study primarily belonged to the Sasanian era. The discovery of plenty of them in this area indicates the region's commercial and industrial prosperity for a long time. Their comparison showed that the pattern of seals like that of Qasr-i Abu Nasr and their role during the Sasanians and then Gods and Goddesses were to maintain and keep their property safe. It is likely that the Tal-i Gerdooha site is directly related to Qasr-i Abu Nasr and was on the route of communication in Istakhr city of northern areas. But the reasons are not clear to us. This road could link to the east of the current Istakhr in Shiraz.

#### **Acknowledgment**

I am thankful to Cyrus Nasrollahzadeh for translating the inscriptions on several bul-



las. I am also grateful to Younes Zare, Abouzar Tavakol, and Kobra Jalilian for their in-

valuable help in the course of this study.

## Bibliography

- Akbazadeh, Daryoush & Daryae, Touraj. (2012). "Inscribed Sasanian Bullae at the National Museum of Iran", *e-Sasanika* 12. 1-27
- Amoozgar, Zhaleh & Tafazzoli, Ahmad. (2003). *Pahlavi Language, literature, Grammatical Sketch, Texts, and Glossary*. Tehran: Moin Publishing Co (In Persian).
- Christensen, Arthur. (2008). *Iran in Sasanian era*. Translated into Persian by Rashid Yasemi, Tehran: Negah Publishing (In Persian).
- Dadvar, A., & Makvandi, L. (2012). "Survey Kings Crown Design in Iran's Coins from Achaemenid to Sassanid Period", *Journal of Fine Arts: Visual Arts*, 4(50), 23-32. doi: 10.22059/jfava.2012.28935 (In Persian).
- Daryae, Touraj. (2004). *The Fall of Sasanians: Foreign Conque Conquerors and Local Resistance*, Translated into Persian by Mansooreh Ettehadieh and Farhanaz Amirkhani Hosseinalou, Tehran: publishing Iran history (In Persian).
- Frye, Richard, N. (1973). *Sasanian Remains from Qasr-i Abu Nasr: Seals, Sealings, and Coins*, Harvard University Press.
- Gobl, Robert. (2000). "Sasanians Coins", In Yarshater, Ehsan (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 3: The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanid Periods, Volume 3(1)*, Cambridge University Press, 322-336.
- Gyselen, Rika. (1989). *La Géographie Administrative de L'empire Sassanide- les témoignages épigraphiques en moyen-persé*. Bures-sur-Yvette: Groupe pour l'Étude de la Civilisation du Moyen-Orient.
- Hinnells, John R. (2007). *Persian mythology*, Translated into Persian by Jaleh Amoozgar & Ahmad Tafazzoli, Tehran: Cheshmeh.
- Jakubiak, Krzysztof. (2011). "Some remarks on the camel on Sasanian seals", *Studies in Ancient Art and Civilization*, No. 15: 107-115.
- Khanmoradi, A., Ekhtesasi, M., & Khonsarinejad, E. (2023). "The Good Shepherd Motif on Sasanian Seals", *Persica Antiqua*, 3(4), 33-47. <https://doi.org/10.22034/pa.2022.352760.1018>
- Maksymiuk, K. (2021). "Armenia in Political and Military Activities of Ardashir I". *Persica Antiqua*, 1(1), 87-96. <https://doi.org/10.22034/pa.2021.133726>
- Panaino, A. (1990). *Tištrya*. Part. I. *The Avestan Hymn to Sirius*, Rome.
- Panjehbashi, E., & Mohazzab Torabi, S. (2022). "Study of Animal Motifs of Sassanid Textile Design", *Ancient Iranian studies*, 1(2), 97-112. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ais.2022.330912.1012>
- Rahbar, M. (2023). "An Investigation of Parthian-Sasanian Stuccoes of Dastowā Shushtar, Khuzestān, Iran", *Ancient Iranian studies*, 2(6), 57-75. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ais.2023.404142.1043>
- Research Foundation for Iranian Studies (2010). *Iranshahr Cities*. The manager of the project, Mohammadreza Nasiri, Vol. 1. Tehran: The Foundation for Iranian Studies.
- Rostami, Houshang and Aryamanesh, Shahin. (2020). "Investigation on Symbolic Badges in Sasanian Rock Reliefs and Stuccoes", Niknami, K and Hozhabri, A (eds.), *Archaeology of Iran in the Historical Period*, Springer Nature Switzerland, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41776-5\\_25](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41776-5_25)
- Roustaee Farsi, E., Zarei, V., & Nemati, Z. (2022). "Analysis of Arab-Sassanid Coins of Dūkohak Village Shelter of Arsanjan, Fars". *Ancient Iranian studies*, 1(4), 55-75. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ais.2023.370610.1032>
- Skupniewicz, P. (2022). "Some Formal Remarks on "Shapur Cameo" and Few Points on Practical Methodology in Researching Sasanian Iconography". *Persica Antiqua*, 2(3), 75-99. <https://doi.org/10.22034/pa.2022.347322.1014>