



The Role of the Ruling Families in the Sassanid Era Based on Archaeological Works

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ABSTRACT

The Sassanid Empire not only had unique characteristics in terms of social, political, cultural, and religious structure but also in terms of geographical conditions and the extent of its territory. According to historical reports, after the fall of the Parthians and the coming to power of the Sassanids, the entire socio-political structure of the society as well as the clan system, as one of the main symbols of the continuation of the power of the Ruling Families, was transferred to the Sassanid period. During the Parthian and Sassanid eras, the administration of all the affairs of the country was in the hands of the "Seven Families". These dynasties were considered as the main foundations of maintaining, stability and continuity of political sovereignty in Iran. The sphere of political influence of these Families in ancient times is extensive and significant, in such a way that not only in many cases, the removal and installation of kings done by them, but sometimes the government was also formed by these Families. The present study aims to examine the role of ruling Families in the Sasanian period. Archaeological works and historical reports have been the basis of this study. So far, comprehensive and independent research has not been done about the Ruling Families, their socio-political position, and their effects on the developments of the Sassanid period, and therefore there is very little and scattered information about them and their performance in the political system of Iran.

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Introduction

The Sassanid social structure and administrative system were: the Family of Ardashir Babakan at the top of the social classes; Then the class of elders or Waspohran, who were in charge of the most important state and military officials; After that, the classes of clerics, teachers, artisans and farmers. The Ruling Family was at the head of social, economic, political, and religious power and institutions in various forms during the Parthian and Sassanid eras. This situation continued until the end of the Sassanid era. According to historical documents, with the collapse of the Parthians and the coming to power of the Sassanids, the entire socio-political structure of the society as well as the Family system was transferred to the Sasanian era. During the Parthian and Sasanian eras, the administration of the country was in the hands of the "Seven Families". These Families were considered the main bases for the preservation, stability, and continuity of the government. Mehr Narsi and his Family had an important position (Mehrabadi, 1993: 165).

The importance of choosing this topic is because according to the author's searches, specific and independent studies that can provide accurate and detailed information about the Ruling Families, their position, and their role and influence in the developments of the mentioned periods have not been done. Therefore, there is no sufficient information about the mentioned Families and their performance, except for a few things. By resorting to this limited information and some brief studies about pre-Islamic dynasties, the author tries to provide an independent and detailed study in relation to the Ruling Families, especially the Mehr Narsi Family, and their role in the developments of the Sassanid period. This issue is examined and explained from many angles.

Methodology

This study was carried out by descriptive-analytical method. From a historical point of view, the role of the Ruling Families in the socio-political and religious developments of the Sasanian period has been investigated. The introduction of the archaeological remains of the Ruling Families can also add to the richness of the author's historical research.

Discussion

The Seven Distinguished Families of the Sassanid Period

We will examine each of these great Sassanid Families separately:

1-Sassanid Family

There were seven great Ruling Families in the Sassanid period, in terms of importance, the Sassanid Ruling Family was considered the first (Christensen, 1999: 73).

2-Karen Family

This name is also recorded as Karen, Gharen, Gharan, and Garenes (Mehrabadi, 1993). This Family has existed since the Parthians and Sassanids. It is assumed that during the Sassanid period, the maintenance of the Kavian Flag was the responsibility of a Family (Noldeke, 2009: 679). The Karen Family enjoyed special prestige during the Parthian and Sassanid periods. Some names of the Karen Family are: Karens, Karins, Qaren, Karin, Qaran, Qaran Barzmehr, Thukher, Zarmehr, El Zarmehr (Mehrabadi, 1993: 186).

Works attributed to the Karen Family:

- 1- The relief of Firouzabad: in the image of Ardashir's coronation, the representative of Karen is standing behind him and holding a windbreaker on his head (Lukonin, 1999: 308-309).
- 2- Naqsh-e Rajab: in the image of the coronation of Ardashir I, the representative of Karen is standing next to Shapur (Lukonin, 1971: 308-309).
- 3- Naqsh-e Rostam: in the scene of the battle of Hormazd II, in Naqsh-e Rostam, Karen is wearing uniform armor and wearing his helmet (Lukonin, 1971: 322) (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Karen with his Roman helmet, thrown down from the horse by Hormazd II, Naqsh-e Rostam.

3-Soren Family

The names of several warriors and nobles of the Parthian and Sassanid periods and all of them were considered noble Families. The root of the word Soren comes from Thoreh, which means hero or mighty. In mentioning the name of the Sorens, Mehrabadi has mentioned 14 of these Families who were part of the nobles and warlords during the Parthian and Sassanid periods. The name of Soren appears for the first time in the Parthian period when Arshak ascended the throne.

Works attributed to the Soren Family:

- 1- Naqsh-e Rajab.
- 2- Paikoli Narsi inscription (Lukonin, 1971: 108-109).
- 3- Sorin stream in Cheshmeh Ali, Ray (Noldeke, 2009: 681) (Fig. 2).



Figure 2: Sorin stream, which today is called Cheshmeh Ali.

4-Mehran Family

The name of the Mehran Family was mentioned since the time of Ardashir I of Sassanid when Ardashir saw the union of the Parthian Family of Mehran and the Sassanid Family. He made sure that no more danger threatened Iran (Shahbazi, 2010: 292). This Family owned large parts of the plains around Tehran (Ray) and Pars. Because the state of Pars was the main seat of the Sassanids, the Mehran Family was not allowed to sell their vast properties. They could only bequeath their spellings to the next generation (Mirahmadi, 2011: 640).

Works attributed to the Mehran Family:

- 1- Bistun inscription: Under the inscription of Darius in Bistun, there is a relief from the

Sassanid period. The first person is the King, the second person is Gudarz, and the third person is a person named Mehran from the Mehran Family.

- 2- Ray: Cheshmeh Ali area in the city of Ray (Kariman, 1975, Vol. 1: 317-318).

- 3- Deh Mehran: in Shahr-e Ray, near the three roads of the mint (Kariman, 1975, Vol. 1: 317-318).

5-Spandiyar Family

Espandiyar is recorded as Asfidiar, Esfandiar, and Esfandiaz. This Family traces its lineage to Esfandiar, son of Gashtasp, who had eleven generations of power in Iran. The Family's power zone was in Ray. In addition, they had properties in Fars and Khorasan. In his genealogy, Ardashir Babakan traces his descent to Esfandiar son of Vishtasb (Gashtasb) and in this way connects himself with the Kiyanians (Weishofer, 2014: 212).

Works attributed to Mehr Narsi:

- 1-Mehr Narsian Fire Temple: The first fire temple was in the Barin Plain and the village of Abarvan, which Tabari also mentions, was the birthplace of Mehr Narsi (Tabari, 1973: 652).

- 2- Jareh Fire Temple: It is located above the Jareh River (Tabari, 1973: 626) (Fig. 3).



Figure 3: Jareh Fire Temple.

6-Espahbad Family

This name has been recorded as Espahbad, Espahpat, Esanbad, Sepahbad and Sepahbaz. There is no doubt that the word Espahbad has been common in Iranian religions since ancient times; This word has been recorded in ancient Persian as "Spadhapati", in Pahlavi as "Spahbaz", in Armenian "Sparapet" and in Syriac as "Aspabad" (Nafisi, 2005: 283).

7-Zikh Family (Zik)

This name is recorded as Zik and Zikes. Contrary to what is wrongly thought now, Zikh was the name of a position or title and not a Family. Zikh has been one of the highest administrative positions and sometimes combined with the military. Although Faustus of Byzantium and Agatha Najoles have considered Zikh (Zik) as a Family name, Menanders considers Zikh to be one of the highest positions of Iranians. The sphere of influence of this dynasty was in the Media of Azerbaijan (Zarinkoub, 1998: 350). Mehrabadi mentioned four cases of this Family in his book (Mehrabadi, 1993: 183). In the inscription of Shapur I, in Naqsh-e Rostam, in paragraph 22, in the mention of the elders accompanying the king, the name of Babak Zik is mentioned as the head of ceremonies (Fray, 2004: 116).

Conclusion

The Ruling Families included tribes that, although they apparently ruled independently, actually being maintained their existence by uniting with each other in times of danger. These tribes who had migrated to Iran as a group, due to having some facilities such as weapons, horses, skills, and martial arts such as horse riding and shooting, were able to overcome the native tribes from the very beginning of their arrival in Iran. At the time of the establishment of the government, these tribes defined their class and position in the first step. They formed a special social stratification in Iran and monopolized political leadership by the

privileged classes. With their decisions and actions, they played an effective role in the administration of political, social, and religious affairs in Iran.

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