

The Reasons for Drawing Attention to Western Iran (Kermanshah Province) During the Second Half of Sassanian Era

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Abstract

Historically, Iran plateau has nurtured different cultures and due to its natural and geographical characteristics, has linked east cultures to Mesopotamia, so that the civilizations related to this plateau have served considerably humanity for a period of 1000 years. Among these cultures, the ones related to the western part of Iran plateau would play significant roles. Zagros foothills which have stretched from northern to the southern west are replete with green and affluent valleys with a distinguished position for the establishment of various cultures since ancient times. Kermanshah as a region located in such western parts draw the attention of Sassanid kings at the last years of fourth century (AD) (the second half of Sasanian kingdom), and Fars province became secondary to Sassanid s. Kermanshah in this period was a part of Mai or Mad located in Koust Khourbaran area, and later this region was called Kermanshah covering lands from Nahavand to Ctesiphon. There are several reasons to Sassanid kings attention in the second half of the Sassanid era to the western parts of Iran including military factors, religious beliefs, good weather, the existence of Khorasan wide road (Silk Road), tendency to gaining independence from religious centers and also commercial and economic factors. This paper, using historical documents and data and applying historical research techniques, attempts to investigate the geographical and political situation of the central Zagros region and the reasons for Sassanid kings attention to this region.

Keywords: Sassanid, Central Zagros, Pars, Kermanshah

Introduction

Pars domain is the origin of the most distinguished ancient Iranian rulers, and two magnificent dynasties called the Achaemenids and Sassanid s have originated from that land. The Pars land has been always controlling by native rulers, therefore, it has been secured from non-native and non-Iranian cultures since the earliest times. (Imanpour, 1998:192). This land had been generally the center of the formation of political thinking and military planning for years, especially since the beginning of the third decade (AD); Ardeshir Babakan was the founder of Sassanid dynasty and it is claimed that his predecessors were Anahita temple custodians. (Christensen, 1944:86; Bosworth, 1999:4) It appears that Pars province is of secondary importance to Sassanid s life at the end of fourth century (AD), and although this land played

significant roles for Sassanid kings, some transitions were made to the western Iran at the second half of the era. Therefore, the present paper, using historical documents on this distinguished domain and analysis of the scholars' ideas and applying historical research techniques, attempts to investigate the situation of Mad and the reasons for the above mentioned transition. To do this, firstly, the Zagros geographical location and Kermanshah position in central Zagros are considered and then effective factors to this transition analyzed.

The geographical Location of Zagros

Zagros is a chain mountain located in western and southern Iran, extending from the northwest to the east west and it is up to 1000 km wide and 200 km long. It begins from Lake Van coasts in Kurdistan and extends to Fars and Kerman provinces. Some sections of Zagros are seen in Iraq as well. In Kurdistan and Lorestan province in Iran, Zagros is located in south eastern and north western, respectively. The western part known as Poshtkooh extends from Kurdistan to Khouzestan. In the eastern part of Zagros, there are various heights extending from Hamadan and Khouzestan provinces which the most significant of them include Alvand in Hamadan, Bistoon in Kermanshah, and Oshtorankooch in Lorestan (Mashkour, 1992, 14; Girshman 2002:2). In Zagros foothills which are ended between Mesopotamia and Elam, the social classes were emerged sooner than other lands and the dominance of Babylon in this area is conspicuous. Zagros area is replete with fertilized valleys surrounded by impassable mountains with affluent vegetation. The presence of jungle trees and also mines (such as iron, copper and zinc) and different types of valuable stones attracted the attention of Assyrian warriors to this area (Diakonov, 2013, pp. 30 & 38).

The Kermanshah geographical location and its position in the central Zagros

Historically, Iran plateau has nurtured different cultures and due to its natural and geographical characteristics, has linked east cultures to Mesopotamia, so that the civilizations related to Iran plateau have served considerably humanity for a period of 1000 years. Among these cultures, the ones related to the western part of Iran plateau would play significant roles. Zagros foothills which have stretched from northern to the west south are replete with green and affluent valleys with a distinguished position for the establishment of various cultures since ancient times.

Kermanshah province located at the western Iran is a semi-mountainous region, which most of its mountains are parallel to each other and extending from west northern to eastern south and they belong to Cenozoic. A part of Zagros Mountains has covered the significant section of this province, and foothills and watershed plateau could be seen only in some parts of low and wide plains of these mountain chains or in wide valleys. Other critical features of this area which would provide people with their admirable advantage include the affluent and nutritious jungles of oak, walnut and almond which their remains could be still observed, long and impassable mountains which were effectively used in the time of war and escape, relatively abundant water and also ranches for breeding livestock (Afshar Sistani, 1992: 95). Due to neighborhood to Ilam and Kasy cultures and also Mesopotamia cultures, this domain has achieved an important and strategic position. It could be added that this land has been the

highway of civilizations, and historically recognized as the Asian gate of entrance to Mesopotamia. Kermanshah would enjoy the privileges of commercial progress and regard as one of the most influential trading and commercial centers in fourth millennium (BC). The traders and dealers in this area would make deal and bartering with those of Susa and Mesopotamia. China and eastern south Asia commercial goods would export from Kermanshah to Middle East, because as it is mentioned in historical texts, Kermanshah was the most distinguished linking way (known as royal way) between Iran, China and India plateaus from one hand and Mesopotamia inhabitants from other hand (Afshar Sistani, 1999:515; Jackson 1973: 265; De Morgan 1960: 2/118). Zagros valleys in Kermanshah and Lorestan provinces were good places for the emergence and development of religious customs. The worship domain of fertility goddess in western and southern Iran has been more prevalent than other Iran ancient regions (Klais, 2006: 91). Unlike other parts of Iran, Kermanshah has been permanently resided at different historical periods, and archeological evidence indicate that Kermanshah is one of the earliest human habitats and one significant population centers. This domain has seen all human life cycles, since ancient times to pre-historical civilization periods and then to the formation of major governments (Zendeh Del, 2000:54).

The reasons for drawing attention to Kermanshah in the second half of Sassanid era

Following Sassanid kings' obsession with western Iran since Artaxerxes II kingdom, this domain achieved reputation and eminence more than any other historical period. The distinguished monuments in this period include country palaces, bridges remains, various inscriptions, king hunting grounds, military castles and the presence of mints indicate the significance of this area. In this time, Kermanshah was ranged from Nahavand to Tisfoon (Soltani, 2012: 56). Selecting one area as the political headquarter of a government must have some reasons: privileging a strategic position, defensive power, having geographical, climate and agricultural facilities, and finally religious beliefs (Kiani, 1989: 20).

Considering above mentioned issues, some reasons for Sassanid obsession with western Iran in the second half of their reign are as follows:

1-Most of Sassanian kings from Ardashir I as the founder of this dynasty to Nersy, have carved their paintings and inscriptions on the rocks surrounding Takht Jamshid (Persepolis), but since Ardashir II, Tagh Bostan, six kilometers of the eastern Kermanshah was selected for this purpose (Yazdi: 1967:95). It could be said that this transition was probably overshadowed by tendency to achieve independence from religious center Estakhr, because thereafter they have ignored Great Goddess Anahita in Pars region.

J. Duchesne Guillemin claims that displacement due to tendency to achieving independence from Anahid and its shrine in Estakhr could be justified. Two Goddesses participated in Ardashir coronation but Anahita could not be seen among them and she disappeared until Khosrow Parviz ruling (J. Duchesne Guillemin, 1996, 3/337). Her absences indicate that coronation is not either conducted in the south and its place was transferred to one of Media shrines. Komon and Duchesne Guillemin have stated that: "it is wise to consider the possibility of two distinct and consequent coronations. The first of them reflected in Tansar Letter was performed immediately after kingdom announced in the presence of inbred princes, masters and landlords, and at the same place where sovereignty was established". They also add

"second coronation was held possibly with the highest glory at the presence of the sacred fire and without conversation with Magi..." (Goubri, 2009: 83-88; Komon: 2007: 181). So it could be assumed that the first custom was held in political capital (i.e. Ctesiphon) and second one in divine capital, and as this capital was transferred to the north of Iran, the custom held at divine capital was also transferred to this region (Azarpay, 1982:18; 122: 2004).

One significant point is that at the second half of Sassanian government, Avestan Geographical regions located in eastern north of Iran, had found some similarities with Iran western areas. This idea shows that Zeordast in Sassanian religious custom could be regarded as a person with an Azarbaijan origin. According to this idea, Wikander assumed Hirbodan and Moebedian as related to two Sassanian religious-geographical regions. He claims that Hirbadan are affiliated with customs and narratives of Iran western south and Estakhr related to the worship of Anahid. Also the group of Sassanian kings which ruled in third and fourth centuries (BC) was the supporter of Hirbodan and the worshippers of Anahid. And Ardeshir Babakan historical account, Ardwiraf Nameh, Tansar Letter, Tabari and Sa'alabi and Farsnameh regard the origin of Ebn Al Balkhi as a Estakhrian, and Moebedian as the west northern of Iran and the capital of Sheaz (Wikander, 1946:1946). According to Dinkerd writing tradition, Masoudi and Shahnameh are related to Sheaz Tradition (Pigoloscaya, 1988: 465-471; Widengern, 1998, 337-356). Therefore, at the time of Hurmoz, Moebedian rank and Mazdaism narration become highly significant and Kertir as a Hirbod ascends to Moebed rank (Nasrollah Zadeh, 2005: 165). It is unknown whether this transition occurred in Ardeshir II ruling or only in Bahram V, later periods such as Khsrow ruling. Another innovation of Ardeshir II is carved inscription Mehr (Mitras) which is the sign of independence from Iranian clergy (Doshan Gimen: 1995:3/318).

2- Another reason is that after Kertir which a divine unanimity and religious totalitarianism in his royal kingdom was observed, Clergymen Zoroastrianism took advantage of a mighty position, and by accession of Nersy, a period begins in which Roman Empire allows a kind of religious negligence. This situation continues to Shapour II (Imanpour, 1980: 224), but by his accession which had passed childhood under the guidance of Moebedan, it is unknown how much he was able to limit the masters and clergy power. Perhaps in this period, kingdom had been converted into non-religious sovereignty and its religious power minimized. Since then or even since Hurmoz II, Sassanid historical monuments could not be seen in Pars and they are found in western Iran (Herrmann& Curtis, 2002: 5). Sassanid history after death of Hurmoz II faced a significant evolution because the religious center was transferred to northwest. Therefore, Shapour II and III have written their inscriptions in Tagh Bostan and Ardeshir II coronation was happened there (Nasr Allah Zadeh, 2005: 218). It could be said that Clergymen Zoroastrianism had taken advantage of an excessive power and the king attempted not only to repulse them from their traditional base, but also to create a new place in where new images could be seen. However, it is not quite clear what was the king's real motivation. Consequently, during long period of Shapour II ruling, the significant point is that the Parthian rulers' attention was drawn into the more significant central parts, i.e. ancient Media which was located at the head of the east and west trading way. Tagh Bostan in Kermanshah is a place for considering new inscriptions which the first of them had been drawn by Ardeshir II. The artistic styles of these works are different from monuments in Pars and Mitra image has increasingly been important beside Hurmazd (Frye: 2006:506; Dariaee, 2003: 85).

3-One cause of the emergence and formation of governments and cities centers during history is religion. The establishment of the government centers beside springs or in vicinity of holy mountains and finally religious beliefs is another cause of the formation of cities and government centers in ancient times (Kiani 237:1987).

During ancient times, mountains were regarded as holy places and the place of God. Iranian always has been taking advantage of different temples and shrines, for example Kangavar, Bistoon, Tagh Bostan and Ghasre Shirin in western Iran. The presence of different altars throughout the country indicates that Zoroaster religion was so popular for ancient Iranian people (Biglari: 1992:1065).

4-Another cause of the transition is geographical factors. Having fertile lands for the development of agriculture and sufficient access to abundant water, avoiding seasonal harming winds and finally benefiting from four regular seasons is one of the most significant geographical characteristics for the selection of government and capital (Kiani 1989). Western Iran especially Kermanshah due to proximity to Ctesiphon, attracted the attention of Sassanid kings and they would pass hot summers in Kermanshah country palaces and pleasant weather of Tagh Bostan. This area was significantly popular from Ardeshir Babakan to the days of Khosrow Parviz and three Sassanid kings (Ardeshir II, Shapour III and Khosrow Parviz) designed some historical monuments surrounding it. Islamic historians have referred to Rome and China agents attending Tagh Bostan palaces and visiting Anoushiravan government (Ghorieshi Zadeh, 2008: 20; Rajabi, 1383: 375/5; Biglari, 1991, 1/78).

5: Another cause for the establishment of capitals and cities in all countries is defensive and military factors. Distinct geographic location and characteristics of the western Iran from the earliest times against the great powers of the time such as Sumeria, Akkad, Babylon, Assyria and in later centuries against countries like Greece and Rome, has led Iran government to create strong military and defensive barriers. According to researchers, a number of cities and capitals of the Parthian and Sassanian had been established because of their military and defense aspects. (Kiani, 1989: 238). Early kings of Sassanians found that Fars province is not deserved to be the resident place for the ruler. Due to its long distance to of the west and northwestern regions of the country which were the competition centers for accessibility to border regions, Fars gradually fell from the boom. It should be noted that, due to centuries of historical events, Mesopotamia and western parts were regarded as the eastern political centers. Ctesiphon was invaded and conquered by enemies which they had come from the northwest river and arrived in the city. On the one hand, the lands under the control of the mighty Empire of Romans were almost behind the gates of Ctesiphon and the other invading Arab tribes settled in the vicinity of this region. Therefore Kermanshah because of the proximity to these regions of Kermanshah received increasing attention. (Fry, 1988: 222/3, Sarfaraz, 2006: 107). Mountainous areas of west and northwest of Iran which would reach the eastern corner of the Black Sea on one side and the other side to reach the middle of the Tigris were not regarded as a normal border among two great nations of Iran and Rome and the geographical situation of the area gave rise to permanent wars. Though Armenia was strong enough to maintain its independence in the face of these two great states, it was possible to act among them as a puppet government, but was very weak. During the Sassanian dynasty, a Parthian dynasty had reigned in Armenia, but the situation was not stable there. Armenia feudality was

always ready to rebel and Iran and Rome empires were in constant conflict (Christensen, 2000:309).

6- Another reason for the increasing significance of Ctesiphon, along with the fertility of the lands between Mesopotamia and cities around this region was the presence of commercial roads which would link Iran to the ports of Mediterranean Sea and Armenia, Albany, Georgia, Lazyka, Persian Gulf coasts, Persian Gulf coasts and southern Arabia. Therefore, another reason for the prominence of the western Iran was its placement at the head of great way Khorasan (Pigoloscaya, 2006:139). Ctesiphon was the starting center of Iranian merchants at the Parthian (Ashkanian) and Sassanian age. Therefore, starting from Ctesiphon and passing Halwan and Kangavar, Silk Road would reach Hamadan, where it was divided into different branches. One branch would turn toward the south and lead to Persian Gulf through Khuzestan and Fars. The second way lead to Ray through Khazar Sea and Khorasan and then lead to India through Kabul. There was also another branch which reaching china by passing Turkestan (Nami et al 2000: 197; Frank and Brawenston, 1997:14). The location of Ctesiphon in the way of Trading Silk Roads (land way) and proximity to Persian Gulf (water way) was strategically highly significant for Sassanid merchants. Therefore, in order to export their goods to the west and east, sea and land merchants had accessibility to Mesopotamia producers (Nami et al. 2009: 197). The economic policy of Sassanid government and Baghdad special natural and commercial position, converted this region into one of the most significant trading centers and a safe place for communication and trading of all merchants throughout the world. Also, a worldwide market was held once in a year in this region, and merchants with a huge amount of capital, great caravans inside and outside the borders of the Sassanid kingdom would gather there (Malayeri 2000, 3/81; Harper 1998:3/660).

Conclusion

Kermanshah (Kambaden) is one major city located in a vast mountainous area which Greeks would call it Media/Mad. The city was limited by Mesopotamia and Iran Great Sahra, westward and eastward, respectively. Due to its neighborhood to Ilam and Kasy cultures from one hand and Mesopotamia cultures from other hand, Kermanshah has been regarded as a critical center from the earliest times. It could be said that city was regarded as the highway to civilizations, and historically, as Asia entrance gate to Mesopotamia plain. There are lots of small lakes, springs and holy rocks in Kermanshah and it enjoys an exceptional strategic situation. This area has been first occupied by Media and then Pars tribes and they had established distinguished cities in the Royal Road which would link east and west and were regarded as idealistic cities which would transfer religious and political messages of Iran culture to every passerby in transition between China, Middle Asia and the West, Iran and Mediterranean coasts. Western Iran, during Sassanid dynasty, especially the second half of Sassanian era draw the attention of Sassanid kings. In this time, Kermanshah was a part of Mad or Mai in Koust Khoobaran province, and later it was called Kermanshahan. Media was changed into "Mai" in Sassanid age and then "Mai" in Islamic decades and it extended from Halwan passage to Hamadan and Kangavar. Also, in the time of first Ghobad, it was divided into two distinct administrative parts. In Sassanid age, Zoroaster temples could be seen in the western Iran, especially Bistoon region, Tagh Bostan and its surrounding valleys, so that some inscriptions have been left in Bistoon and

its surroundings which indicate holiness and prominence of mountain, plain and springs of these areas for Iranian. Some reasons for drawing attention to the western Iran in Sassanid age are as follows. First, Zoroaster clergy in Pars were excessively empowered and king attempted not only to repulse them from their traditional base, but also to establish a new location with new pictures. Second, it appears that the king wanted to achieve independence from the religious center Estakhr, which the presence of inscription Mehr (Mitreh) in the western Iran (Tagh Bostan) as the sign of independence from Iranian clergy traditions confirms this idea. As it was indicated, mountains were regarded as holy places of Gods in ancient times. There was no doubt an old shrine in Tagh Bostan which was established especially for the worship of Anahita at the age of Mazdaism. Therefore, this place had a significant position from the earliest times. It could be said that other reasons for Sassanian kings' attention to Kermanshah was its proximity to Ctesiphon and also the presence of hunting-grounds, palaces and pleasant climate, where the kings from Ardeshir Babakan until the age of Khosrow Parviz would pass their hot summers in these places. The literature refers to country gardens and buildings established by the order of Khosrow Parviz in this area. Other reasons for Sassanids' kings' attention to the western Iran include: the presence of the lands under the control of the strong western empire (Rome) almost behind the gates of Ctesiphon, the proximity of Arab aggressive tribes to this area and their frequent attacks on Iran and lack of a robust government in this country, and also the strategic location of the western Iran due to its connection to main road Khorasan. In other words, as Kermanshah was located at the head of this road, it was the highway of civilizations and recognized as Asian main gate to Mesopotamia plain.

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